

Faith/learning Essay Mark II

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The Love of Letters and the Desire of God: Dis-integrating the Dichotomy of Faith and Learning

Some gnats come from the grass to speak with Solomon.

“O Solomon, you are the champion of the oppressed.
You give justice to the little guys, and they don't get
any littler than us! We are tiny metaphors
for frailty. Can you defend us?”

“Who has mistreated you?”

“Our complaint is against the wind.”

“Well, says Solomon, “you have pretty voices,
you gnats, but remember, a judge cannot listen
to just one side. I must hear both litigants.”

“Of course,” agreed the gnats.

“Summon the East Wind!” calls out Solomon.

What happened to the plaintiffs? Gone.

Such is the way of every seeker who comes to complain
at the High Court. When the presence of God arrives,
where are the seekers? First there's dying,
then union, like gnats inside the wind.

-Rumi¹

I have a small printed sign over my desk bearing the words “*per amorem agnoscimus*,”² a quotation from St. Gregory the Great, a medieval scholar and pope who was, among other things, responsible for the evangelization of the British Isles. The usual translation is “we know through love,” but the connotations of the Latin *agnoscimus* go far beyond that. Were the sentiment simply about intellectual knowing, the most straightforward word would just be *scimus*, “we know.” The verb *scire*, however, is only about *having* knowledge. The connotations are those of certainty, being aware of a fact, having information. *Agnoscere* is a combination of two other words: the first is *noscere*, which is also a word about knowledge, but one that's more inchoate and active. It's about *getting to know*

1 A. J. Arberry et al., *The essential Rumi*, 1ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), pp. 124-5.

2 *Moralia*, 10.13. For a convenient English translation, see <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoraliaIndex.html>

something or someone, about ascertaining knowledge rather than just having it. The second is the preposition *ad*, which acts, in this case, as an intensifier: semantically, *ad* creates the sense of a *movement toward* something.

So Gregory's sentiment is not simply about knowing in a factual sense, *scire*, but rather in the sense of *ad-noscere*, a movement toward a process of recognition, a kind of continual becoming in the direction of understanding, not the way one "understands," say, daylight savings time, but rather the way one continually works toward understanding a difficult idea, a mystery, or a friend. Gregory then adds an important qualifier that speaks to the only avenue through which this particular kind of understanding can be attained: *per amorem*, through love. In other words, for Gregory, real knowledge, authentic knowledge that goes beyond having information, can only be accomplished via love—not because of it, not in addition to it, but *through* it. Love is not a complementary concept to knowledge, but rather a *necessary condition* of knowledge.

I've always used that phrase as a kind of slogan for what I'm trying to do as a scholar and teacher and colleague. But it's become increasingly important to me as I've been thinking about and researching for an essay that, according to the guidelines sent to me for my tenure portfolio, should address something called the "integration of faith and learning" according to something called a "Christian worldview"—phrases that have never quite satisfied me. It's possible, of course, that my head spends way too much time in the Middle Ages, and my medievally-inflected thinking doesn't fully want to address issues in terms of the post nineteenth-century positivism that enjoys the neatly-pigeonholed categories that seem to encourage us to keep concepts like "faith" and "learning" so separate that we feel the need to violently mash them together as though only car-crushing hydraulic pressure will keep them from springing back to their clearly-labeled boxes. The very idea of "faith-learning integration," after all, strongly implies a natural separation: one wouldn't insist on "integrating" elements that were already naturally inseparable. And the thing is, for Gregory, they are:

Christian love and faith are *necessary preconditions* of understanding. He'd probably chuckle at the idea of trying to “integrate” faith and learning; the whole idea would likely strike him as analogous to trying to “integrate” clouds and rain.

What I'd like to attempt in this essay is to more fully explore Gregory's ideas about knowledge with a view toward a theory of what it means to be a Christ-following scholar. Gregory has been an important provocation, comfort, inspiration, and source of not-always-comfortable conviction to me as I've struggled with what it means to be a faculty member in a present-day Christian academy, one in which the imperatives of academic freedom and inquiry unbridled by dogma can sometimes conflict with a sense of doctrinal orthodoxy and institutional identity, and one which is sometimes seen as existing in opposition to a “secular” academy infused with meaningless relativism. Gregory's view of knowledge in the *Moralia in Job*, in its grasp of the depth of the effects of the fall on human knowledge, in its insistence on love as the precondition of knowledge, and in its unflinching sense of humility, can offer a useful model for what it means to be a Christian scholar. As an alternative, or a supplement, to the prevalent “integrationist” model of Christian scholarship, I will propose, based on Gregory's thinking, an “attitudinal” model, one that sees the core of Christian scholarship more in the drive to purify one's intentions than in the relationship of one's work to a set of doctrinal propositions that constitute a “worldview.” Rather than contain my discussion of Gregory to a purely theoretical essay about faith and learning, I will return to it in each of the self-evaluation essays concerning teaching, research, and service, treating those discussions as *applications* of the theory, using the “razor” of Gregory's *per amorem* as a useful basis on which to analyze and critique my own work in each area.

Per Amorem Agnoscimus: Knowledge in the Moralia in Job

St. Gregory, to me, is an inspiring character. He seems to have had a particular knack for melding the contemplative life with the worldly, politicized one—largely because he was thrust into the

latter against his will. The studious monk was ordained a deacon by his papal predecessor, Pelagius II, in the 570's, and elected pope in 590, though he refused to use the title, referring to himself in all correspondence as “servant of the servants of God.”³ While perhaps a reluctant pontiff, he was by no means an ineffective one. He was responsible, among many other accomplishments, for the evangelization of the British Isles—and, from there, most of northern Europe. According to Charles Kannengiesser, “Gregory made history, but it is not always clear how much he loved the power he exercised. He seems to have identified with his office in such an unselfish way that his spiritual message kept its pristine vigor throughout his most compromising political engagements. Rarely, if ever, was Christian mysticism so intensely involved in worldly affairs without losing its genuine inspiration.”⁴ So successful was Gregory in negotiating his spiritual and secular roles that even John Calvin, himself more than a little ill-disposed toward the papacy, acknowledged Gregory as the last “good” pope to come along before the papacy drove itself and the church into error.⁵ Gregory also suffered from physical illness for much of his life, which he felt weakened his powers of expression, “wherein the grade of the delivery is so dissipated by the broken condition of the instrument.”⁶ Here is a figure with which a Christian scholar of the Middle Ages can identify: a bookish introvert, thrust into a situation in which he had to hang on to his calling as a scholar under a constant pull of secular life and politics, all the while feeling inadequate to the task, dwarfed by the enormity of his subject, and weighed down by the weakness of his all-too-human body and mind. No one could have been better prepared to express the ideas in the *Moralia in Job*, from which the phrase “per amorem agnoscimus” is taken.⁷

3 Bede, Thomas Stapleton, and John Edward King, *Baedae Opera historica, with an English translation*, (London: W. Heinemann; New York : Putnam, 1930), I:xiii.

4 Charles Kannengiesser, "Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great," in *Medieval theologians* Anonymous (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 30.

5 "Institutes of the Christian Religion," in Christian Classics Ethereal Library [database online]. Available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.vi.html?highlight=gregory#highlight>.

6 Pope Gregory I , *Moralia in Job.; Morals on the book of Job*, Anonymous (Oxford : J.H. Parker, 1844-1850.), V:introduction.

7 *ibid.*, X:xiii.

The *Moralia* takes the form of a commentary on the Book of Job, a careful verse-by-verse explication of both the “historical” and “moral” meanings of the text. Gregory uses Job as an opportunity to reflect on the limitations of human understanding, and indeed our ultimate reliance on Divine grace to understand anything at all. “Given the poor state of the human mind since the fall of Adam and Eve,” writes Kannengeisser,

...we forever face the Unknown. Only negative assertions are thinkable in proper theology. Augustine had already been of that same opinion. Contemplation of divine realities is given by divine grace. Its beneficiaries are called to a state of reception—a challenge enough by itself—more than proceeding to a deliberate intellection. They may reach a blurred and uncertain vision, a "nocturnal" apprehension of the supernatural. They remain people of desire, not of possession, even at the extreme limit of their inner journey, when their soul finds itself *reverberata*, at once blinded and repelled by divine bliss ...⁸

In a way, Gregory here takes what might seem a cynically dim view of human knowledge: to him it is simply impossible-for humans, whose reason is irreversibly darkened by the fall, to understand God, to grasp anything like the real Truth in all its fullness. The purpose of study, for Gregory, is not the enlightenment project of “discovering” truth by our own efforts but rather to open ourselves to the action of divine grace upon our minds. Even in our moments of greatest openness and communication with God, Gregory evinces a painful awareness that worldly concerns still always weigh us down and cloud our understanding. While Gregory most certainly believes that God is there, and that his Truth is absolute, he is also aware that even when, by his own action, God imparts some of that truth, the moment that truth hits the always-already corrupted atmosphere of the human mind, it is dispersed, diffracted, and garbled by our own sin. What we wind up with is only the barest scintilla of the reality, a fleeting, nocturnal glimpse.

The actual phrase “*per amorem agnoscimus*” occurs in 10.13, which is a gloss on Job 11:7, Gregory rendering it, from the Vulgate, as “Canst thou find out the footsteps of God? Canst thou find

8 Kannengeisser, *Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great*, p. 35.

out the Almighty unto perfection?”⁹ The context in Job is that of Job's friend, Zophar, giving Job a lot of high-minded advice after Job has just spent the last 21 verses lamenting and questioning God's motives in punishing him. Zophar is something like Gregory's poster child for one who has knowledge in the sense of *scire* but not in the sense of *agnoscere*, always saying the right thing for the wrong reasons, and, because of that, ironically betraying his foolishness by never grasping the wisdom of his own words. Glossing the verse, Gregory immediately picks up on the valence of the Vulgate's word for “footprints,” *vestigia*: “What does he call the “footsteps” of God save the lovingkindness of his visitation”¹⁰ Already, here, Gregory sees what a human being can perceive of God as literally a footprint, a “vestige,” a trace of God's passing rather than a view of the God that passed. The next sentence is the one in which our key phrase appears, and is worth a full quote:

By these [footprints], clearly, we are called forth to progress toward celestial things when we are touched by the breath of the spirit, and, lifted out of the confining straits of the flesh, through love we perceive [*agnoscimus*] the splendor given for our contemplation, which we must follow.¹¹

The important thing to notice here is that nothing in this passage is related to human effort. God leaves the “footprints” of His “visitations,” by which we *are called*, *are touched*, and *are lifted*. The passive constructions are intentional: we are not so much actors as we are acted upon. The one action we do take, for Gregory, is that of *loving*. This is where we *allow* ourselves to be called, touched, and lifted up, though which attitude we can then perceive the splendor God has placed there for us, which, then, compels us to strive after it. The problem is that there is a simultaneous compulsion in the opposite direction as well:

But at this present time, the grace of the Spirit which is poured into our hearts lifts the soul from carnal aims, and elevates it into a contempt for transitory things, and the

9 Gregory I, *Moralia in Job.*; *Morals on the book of Job*, X:xiii.

10 *ibid.*, X:xiii.

11 "SS Gregorius I Magnus - Moralia Pars 04 [0590-0604] Full Text at Documenta Catholica Omnia," Available from http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0590-0604_SS_Gregorius_I_Magnus_Moralia_Pars_04_LT.pdf.html. *Quid Dei vestigia nisi benignitatem illius visitationis vocat? Quibus nimirum progredi ad superna provocamur cum ejus Spiritus afflatu tangimur, et, extra carnis angustias sublevati, per amorem agnoscimus auctoris nostri contemplantam speciem, quam sequamur.* The translation in this case is my own.

mind looks down upon all that it coveted below, and is kindled to objects of desire above, and by the force of her contemplation she is carried out of the flesh, while by the weight of her corruption she is still held fast in the flesh; she strives to obtain sight of the splendour of uncircumscribed Light, and has not power; for the soul, being burthened with infirmity, both never wins admittance, and yet loves when repelled.¹²

There is an interesting opposition of forces in this passage: our “lifting” out of the flesh toward greater comprehension of God, for Gregory, only comes with a simultaneous pull, the “weight” of the fallen body and mind, in the other direction. Because of this, the soul does not, of its own accord, have the power in itself to “obtain sight of the splendor” of the Creator. But for Gregory this isn't so much an impediment as it is a natural part of the process, the soul “never wins admittance yet loves when repelled.” In other words, the state in which the human soul strives for a glimpse of God is naturally one of simultaneous lifting up and pulling down, of desire and repulsion, of approach and withdrawal. But for Gregory even our failure is an important part of the process. To contemplate God and fail is to “behold the power of His incomprehensible nature, in that though we fail in the actual investigation of His secret counsels, yet by that very failure we more thoroughly learn through whom we should fear.”¹³ The negative part of the equation is as important a component as the positive. The best a human being can achieve happens 99.9% through divine action, the only component in which we have any agency at all being our decision to love. And the state we achieve is one not one of full understanding or communion but of *reverberation*: strung tightly between the poles of the perfect and spiritual and the fallen and earthly, and, set against the sounding board of the whole of scripture (as Hugh of St. Victor would put it a few centuries later¹⁴), we *are plucked*, and experience the music of the resulting vibration. We do not know. We do not understand. We *resonate*.

So how do we achieve the best such resonance? For Gregory, it's a matter of identifying that which pulls us down and finding the right position from which we can best counteract it (realizing that it will always be there no matter what we do). Interestingly, Gregory wraps up his entire sense of those

12 Gregory I, *Moralia in Job.*; *Morals on the book of Job*, X.xiii.

13 *ibid.*, X.xiii.

14 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon de Studio Legendi*, (Frieberg: Herder, 1997)

things that pull our reason down and away from God in the idea of *pride*. What causes our reason to fail is concentration on the worldly, which Gregory explicitly identifies as those things that cause us to mistakenly trust—or worse, become dependent upon—our own ideas, our own constructs, our own identity. According to Matthew Baasten, “For Gregory, then, the objects employed by the devil to tempt the worldly to become swelled with self-elation can all be grouped under one general umbrella, the successes of this life...”¹⁵ Gregory, here, goes beyond the usual sense of what we mean by “carnal desires” (i.e. the more obvious temptations of things like food, money, and sex), and identifies as a much larger problem our tendency to trust our own minds, to take pride in things that we have created. For Gregory, this is precisely Zophar's problem in Job. Thus he reads Zophar's first words in response to Job's torrent of lament in Job 11 as almost humorously ironic: “*Should not he that talketh much hear in his turn? And should a man full of words be justified?*” Gregory acknowledges that Zophar here offers a correct statement, but Zophar's problem is that *he's* the one that talketh much and is full of words, and he doesn't realize that his words are more damning of himself than they are of Job. He knows the right thing to say, but takes so much pride in his ability and opportunity to say it that the wisdom of those words is lost on their speaker in the very moment of their utterance. Zophar's problem is that the starting point of his utterance is himself, his own sense of identity. Because he speaks from his identity, his desire to believe himself more righteous than Job, Job's (really more righteous) statements wind up functioning as a threat to Zophar's identity. That sense of threat leads him, ironically, to say out loud, when he should be listening, that there's something wrong with a person who says things out loud when he should be listening:

For forward men account nothing right, but what they themselves think, and they reckon the words of the righteous idle in the degree that they find them differing from their own notions. Nor yet did Zophar deliver a fallacious sentiment, ‘that a man full of words could never be justified,’ in that so long as anyone lets himself out in words, the gravity

15 Matthew Baasten, *Pride according to Gregory the Great : a study of the Moralia*, Anonymous (Lewiston, N.Y. : E. Mellen Press, 1986.), p. 32.

of silence being gone, he parts with the safe keeping of the soul.¹⁶

Interestingly, Gregory's antidote to Zophar's brand of pride isn't directly its opposite, humility. Instead, Gregory takes a step back even from there and looks for the *source* of humility, finding it in *love*: “In humility, one acknowledges his dependence on God; whereas in love one keeps the intention of an act pure from pride and its immediate daughter, vainglory.”¹⁷ For Gregory, love purifies the intentions behind one's actions, away from trust in one's own accomplishments and constructs, toward the kind of openness to God that leads to humility in the realization of the weakness of one's own reason in the face of God's Truth. When we realize that kind of dependence on God, we can realize that “any good we do or truth we attain is the result of God working within us rather than anything we did.”¹⁸ What leads to the most authentic kind of knowledge, then, is the purification of the intentions, which is something that is accomplished by God in the seeker of knowledge when he/she adopts an attitude of love, which Gregory has defined earlier as that state in which we allow God's grace to act upon our fallen, darkened minds. *Per amorem agnoscimus*, indeed.

One important implication of Gregory's idea of knowledge, here, is that it makes the pilgrimage toward authentic knowledge very much about the maintenance of a certain quality of intention (love). What most gets in the way of that intention, for Gregory, is *concentration on accomplishments and identity* rather than on the *purification of the process by love*. Another way of putting this might be to say that the more I invest my identity in my accomplishments as a scholar, or the more I evaluate my scholarly efforts out of my own sense of my identity, the less authentic will be the knowledge I seem to gain. The more I invest in my own accomplishments and identity, the more I will become like Zophar, the man who says all the right things, but whose understanding of them flies itself apart in the very act of expression, because his intention in uttering the “right” things is ultimately about the reification of

16 Gregory I, *Moralia in Job*.; *Morals on the book of Job*, X.ii.

17 Baasten, *Pride according to Gregory the Great : a study of the Moralia*, p. 92.

18 *ibid.*, p. 94.

his own identity rather than the transformation of his mind by God.

Ultimately, I think I've learned two important—and convicting—things from Gregory. One is that the idea of “Christian scholarship” goes far beyond the realm of what Gregory and Hugh would call “intellection,” and enters the realm of the whole orientation of my being toward God and toward inquiry and study, that orientation beginning with an attitude of love. The relationship between faith and learning, in this case, is not that faith enhances or critiques learning; it is that love should be the *condition* of learning. The most authentic kind of learning is not possible without it. The second thing I've learned is that the most significant impediment to having a proper orientation in love is my own investment in my identity and accomplishments. This is not to say, of course, that I don't think Christian scholars should accomplish anything, or that those accomplishments should not be valued or evaluated; only that they can't, in themselves, be my reason for engaging in scholarship. Such a realization is terribly convicting when I consider how much time I spend fretting over what's on my *vita* and measuring my accomplishments against those of others.

I'm reminded of the origin of evil in the world of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion*: the two Valar (the first beings created by Ilúvatar) gifted with the capacity for making are Aulë and Melkor. The difference between them is that while Aulë only takes joy in the process of creating, seeing his products only as opportunities to begin working on a new project, Melkor takes pride in the products themselves. Melkor's drive for accomplishment led him to envy the gifts of the other Valar, and thereafter he “spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could.”¹⁹ Because of this, Melkor ultimately becomes the enemy, Morgoth, begetter of all evil in Middle Earth, the one who makes Sauron, the evil presence in *The Lord of the Rings*, look like a homesick hobbit. I shudder to think, though, at how apt a description the idea of making nothing “save in mockery of the thoughts of

19 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 27.

others” is of much scholarship I've seen within and without the “Christian” academy, including not a little of my own. This is the reason, I think, that Christian scholars really can have a potential advantage: if concentration on one's Christian faith can create a freedom from pride (especially in things like professional accomplishments), and a freedom from fear (like that nagging feeling of not “measuring up” that I think more of us feel than admit), it can free a scholar from two of the most destructive impediments to learning (not to mention teaching). Whatever the most authentic scholarship is, I'm pretty certain that it's not produced out of a drive to service one's vita or shrilly assert one's expertise for its own sake. What's left when we remove these things, as only a response to the Gospel and a communion with Christ can do, runs much deeper than a simple comparison of one set of propositions to another (like a “worldview” to a “discipline”): it's a purer form of inquiry itself.

Gregory understands that the kind of destructive pride described above is precisely Zophar's problem: he refers everything to himself. When he hears truth from Job, it grates at him because it stands to show him up, so he spouts his “wisdom” at Job in order to feel better about himself, never aware, as Gregory is, at how ironically his own discourse undermines itself in its self-referentiality. Zophar's words never involve God, even though they are perfectly theologically correct. He has the “right worldview” (what biblical scholars of Job refer to as the “wisdom tradition”), but that worldview ultimately both begins and ends with his own identity, his own fear, his own pride. His “proper” worldview, far from enabling him to evaluate all other worldviews accurately, even leads him to blatant misreading: in 11:4, Zophar “quotes” Job: “...you say, ‘My conduct is pure, and I am clean in God’s sight’” (NRSV) and proceeds to censure Job for his assertion of purity. But Job has never claimed purity. He claims to be “innocent” and undeserving of the amount of “punishment” meted out to him. Gregory notices this as well: “how could he call himself pure, who says, / If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me/ [Job 9, 20].”²⁰ Gregory says of Zophar's motives, “...but there is

20 Gregory I, *Moralia in Job.*; *Morals on the book of Job*, X.iv.

this in the wickedness of the unrighteous, that, while it refuses to bewail real evil things in itself it invents them in others.”²¹ In other words, Zophar's attention to his own need for a sense of greater righteousness has led him, here, to not only misread a text, but to use that misreading to create a “straw man” that invalidates the rest of his argument, even though he's blind to his own mistake. This is certainly one situation in which I don't want to find myself as a literary scholar: that of being so blinded by my preconceptions that I stumble into a serious misreading of a text.

Job, on the other hand, is a different sort of animal: he's the one lamenting, questioning God, questioning (though never abandoning) the very foundations of his belief. Yet he's presented as the wise one, the one with the more authentic relationship with God. Job is presented as wiser because he shows that he knows he has things to learn—even things that cut to the very core of his faith, including whether or not God isn't just a cruel, arbitrary tyrant. Job's “worldview” (i.e. what would be the received “credal” wisdom tradition concerning God's justice) certainly asserts that God is just. His friends know this very well. But it's interesting to me that *Zophar* is the one who's actively comparing that received wisdom to the subject at hand. Based on that comparison of his worldview to his subject (i.e. Job's suffering), he arrives at what, according to his worldview, is a perfectly logical conclusion: Job is being punished for his sin. But Zophar is clearly presented as the one who, no matter how doctrinally correct, is still *wrong* because his intentions lie with himself rather than with God.

Job, instead of applying a correct worldview, *asks whether or not his worldview is correct*. Gregory presents Job as the good guy, then, precisely because he's *not* the one who hangs his judgments on the correct worldview. Instead, Job is an authentic inquirer. He wants *to learn*. He wants to inquire and debate (even with God in 10:3: “I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me!”) Job isn't making pronouncements or relying on received wisdom. He's asking questions. Zophar thinks he knows why; Job *wants to know why* and cries out to God with a

21 *ibid.*, X.iv.

desperate desire for that knowledge. Job's wisdom reads to Zophar as nothing more than a threat to his worldview, which has become so bound up with his own sense of self that the two have become indistinguishable. For that reason, what may be a perfectly correct worldview has become, for Zophar, nothing more than a precarious delusion. And the more precarious the delusion, the greater the lengths to which one must go to preserve it, which in turn deepen the delusion that much more.

What I think Gregory's view of knowledge, via the *per amorem* idea, offers Christian scholars a way out of Zophar's worldview/identity loop by offering a method or orientation for Christian scholars that is rooted not in identity but in, as expressed above, the constant effort to purify the intentions through love. It is hardly unorthodox (especially for a Lutheran like myself), to suggest that humans cannot, by their own efforts, lift themselves out of their entrapment in the universe of fallen human discourse (even Saint Augustine narrates his inability to will his own conversion even after he's convinced himself intellectually of the truth of the Gospel). Gregory recognizes that only God can do that, in the process by which, to quote once again, "...we are called forth to progress toward celestial things when we are touched by the breath of the spirit, and, lifted out of the confining straits of the flesh, through love we perceive [*agnoscimus*] the splendor given for our contemplation, which we must follow."²² Zophar's problem, I think, is little more than another way of expressing what Gregory means by the "confining straits of the flesh." Gregory's idea gives us nothing less than a path toward greater freedom from *pride*, and the freedom from the fear that brings. The more a Christian scholar can do this, I think, the less he or she will need to assert an identity, or a "worldview," because he or she will increasingly act as a conduit through which Christ's identity emanates.

What, then, might such an orientation look like on the ground? And how would a concept of Christian scholarship that lies more overtly in the intentions of the learner than in the content of the work differentiate a Christian scholar from any other kind? On the surface, it might not—at least not

²² See note 12, above.

always, and especially not at first. Jean Leclercq, a 20th century scholar of Gregory, sees Gregory's method as a lifetime process: "The Christian life according to St. Gregory, he writes, "is a progression which moves from humility to humility, one might say; from humility acquired to humility infused; nurtured by the desire of God in a life of temptation and detachment, deepened and confirmed through loving knowledge in contemplation."²³ It's interesting to me that in the French the phrase *désir de Dieu* can be translated equally well as "the desire for God" and the "desire of God," an indication (in the tradition of the delight in wordplay common in French academic writing) that both are in play; not only our desire, but God's. The phrase *connaissance amoureuse* (translated above as "loving knowledge") is fascinating, too: literally "amorous knowing," a phrase that does not allow love and knowledge to be separated from one another, nor does it allow knowledge to be a static concept.

We might take further instruction from one of Gregory's intellectual successors, the 11th century scholar, Hugh of St. Victor. In his *Didascalicon de Studio Legendi*, essentially a treatise on what and how Christian scholars should read and learn, he defines a Christian orientation toward knowledge this way: "The beginning of discipline is humility, of which, though the lessons should be many, these three are especially relevant to the reader: first, that no learning, no writing should be deemed worthless; second, that one should blush to learn from no one; third, that once one has acquired knowledge, one should not look down on others."²⁴ In other words, a Christian scholar who wants to begin in love and humility, should (1) see every text as a potentially valid source of knowledge, (2) be willing to learn from anyone who is willing to teach, and (3) never get cocky (this would, I think, include never using any theoretical or methodological orientation, including Christianity, as a blunt object). I will flesh out more of what these concepts mean to me in my actual research, teaching, and

23 Jean Leclercq, *L'Amour des Lettres et le Desir de Dieu*, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1957), pp. 38-9. "*La vie Chrétienne selon S. Gregoire est une progression qui va de l'humilité à l'humilité, on pourrait presque dire: de l'humilité acquise à l'humilité infuse; humilité entretenue par le désir de Dieu dans un vie de tentation et de détachement, approfondie et confirmée par las connaissance amoureuse dan la contemplation.*" The translation is mine. The first half of my essay title, of course, is borrowed from Leclercq's.

24 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon de Studio Legendi*, III.xiii. "*Principium autem disciplinae humilitas est, cuius cum multa sint documenta, haec tria praecipue ad lectorem pertinent: primum, ut nullum scientiam, nullum scripturam vilem teneat, ut a nemine discere erubescat, tertium, ut cum scientiam adeptus fuerit, ceteros non contemnat.*" My trans.

service in later sections of this portfolio (and it turns out that Gregory's "razor" can be a very useful and often very convicting basis for self-critique), though I'm too early in the process of becoming that kind of scholar to be any sort of model. But this attitude accurately characterizes how I've witnessed my own mentors and role models at Bethel operating. None of them "apply a worldview to their discipline" so much as they exude the Gospel in everything they do as scholars: in the vigor and authenticity (to say nothing of the quality) of their research; in the love of their subject matter; in their respectful, even deferential, treatment of those with whom they disagree; in their attitude of positioning themselves always as learners and never asserting their expertise for its own sake—not to mention their tolerant and loving support of a sometimes stumbling (and sometimes prideful) junior colleague. Everything they do does not simply "integrate" their faith and their subject matter, but rather stems from their very beings as believers. It is this quality of operating out of love in everything that most differentiates them as Christians from those I've encountered on the standard academic "fast track," whose goals are more to publish, impress, and compete in a "market" of scholarship than to love, to study, and to learn. Gregory's method offers nothing less, to me, than the possibility for the most authentic kind of inquiry—inquiry untrammelled by over-identification with the meritocracy of the academy, by personal fears of inadequacy, or by uncritical immersion in any particular methodology or ideology. It offers freedom and joy in the process of learning. And my hope is that, most importantly, it will help me to allow Christ's grace to better transform my own mind, so that I might be compelled to follow the splendor given for my contemplation.

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