Theodosia Gray

THE HOMILIES OF
SAINT GREGORY
THE GREAT

On the Book of the
Prophet Ezekiel

in
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Introduction by Bishop Chrysostomos
Edited by
Presbytera Juliana Cownie
The Homilies of St. Gregory the Great

On the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Translated by Theodosia Gray

With an Introduction by Bishop Chrysostomos

Edited by Presbytera Juliana Cownie

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST ORTHODOX STUDIES

Etna, California
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ο σταλαγματισμός
INTRODUCTION

It was with particular pleasure that I initially urged the other directors of the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies to undertake the publication of Ms. Gray’s translation of the homilies of St. Gregory the Great on the writings of the Prophet Ezekiel. First, these sermons have never appeared in English translation, making their publication an event of some moment. Second, Ms. Gray, whom I met in Sweden while I was teaching at the Theological Institute of Uppsala University—of which she is a graduate—, is meticulous in her translation, having spent more than a decade in preparing the present work. It seems to me that, combined with her sensitivities as an Orthodox Christian, this scholarly scrupulosity helps to bring into vivid focus the position that St. Gregory, as a so-called Latin Father, holds in the Eastern Orthodox world.

To be sure, from an Orthodox standpoint St. Gregory the Great, the Dialogos, stands in the tradition of the Greek Fathers. Though many Western commentators are quick to cite, as evidence of his Latin disposition, St. Gregory’s lack of abilities in Greek, his great attention to the writings of the Blessed Augustine, and his immersion into a Roman society largely separated from the world of the Greek Fathers, their arguments are greatly overstated and subject to dispute. St. Gregory’s theological writings and views generally reflect the consensual unity of the Greek Fathers. Indeed, in several places in his writings he demonstrates a knowledge of Greek. Moreover, an overstatement of the admittedly growing distance between the Latin West and Byzantine East does not address the Byzantine hegemony which nonetheless still prevailed in the Mediterranean world in the sixth century. In fact, St. Gregory has always held a position of great honor in the Eastern Church. His writings are widely read and appreciated, and the standardized text of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, one of the three liturgies most commonly celebrated in the Orthodox Church, is often attributed by Orthodox sources—albeit wrongly so—to his pen.

It is also important to understand that the Eastern Church has long appreciated St. Gregory’s ecclesiology, which expresses with some precision the Orthodox teaching about the Roman See, which he occupied. The Orthodox Church has always rejected the notion of Papal primacy, a notion which gained greater and greater ascendancy in the Latin Church as that church became ever more separated from its Eastern roots. Though many of his statements have been invoked to support the modern idea of Roman supremacy in the Christian Church, St. Gregory...
very clearly attributed to the See of St. Peter a primacy of spiritual honor only—a primacy which he in turn ascribes to the Church of Antioch, too, a See which St. Peter, according to tradition, held for several years before going to Rome. To the See of Alexandria, founded by St. Mark, he also attributes a primacy of honor, since the Apostle Mark was sent to Alexandria by St. Peter himself. His references to the shared primacy of the Petrine See correspond exactly to the Orthodox Church’s understanding of the Petrine primacy as one of confession, the very confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God, upon which rock the Church is built. As Bishop of Rome, St. Gregory exercised his authority—indeed, shared his authority—as an expression of his duty to uphold the confessional truths of the Christian Faith and the unity of the Christian witness, retreating into Scripture in affirming oneness with his fellow Bishops: “Ut omnes unum sint....”

It is notable that when the Pope, or Patriarch (the actual meaning of the appellation “Pope”), of Constantinople assumed the title “Oecumenical Patriarch,” it was Pope Gregory who first objected to this title, not because it compromised the supposed primacy of the Roman Pontiff, but because he feared that the Constantinopolitan See thus intended to compromise the essential equality of all Bishops in the Christian Church. In our times, when the Petrine supremacy of the Roman Pontiff has become a dogma and when the Patriarch of Constantinople has come to misunderstand his simple primacy of honor in such as way as to distort the equality of the episcopacy that the Orthodox Church has always zealously guarded, St. Gregory’s ecclesiology takes on a new significance for us. It is thus no unimportant thing to see his writings more widely distributed, that we might draw on his general wisdom and emulate his able guardianship over the spiritual foundations of the Church.

Also today, when great changes are on the horizon and when society faces challenges and threats it has never before known, the person of St. Gregory takes on a particular importance for Christians in general—for Orthodox and heterodox alike. Throughout his writings, there is a sense of urgency, reflecting the confusion and turmoil of his own age. He anticipates at all times the impending end of time, placing great stress on the individual Christian’s need for spiritual renewal and preparation for the other world. He thus touches on one of the essentials of Christianity: its constant and relentless reference to the eternal realm, which lies beyond the world of sin and which beckons every Christian in every age to the ever-present end of the world that is ushered in by the inevitability of individual death. In his apocalyptic zeal he inspires each of us to prepare for the visitation of death, just as he calls our age of confusion and chaos to sober reflection on the eschatological realities which all of mankind shall either forestall by its repentance or en-
St. Gregory was a man of great culture, known for his gentle nature and distinguished for his courage in confessing the Christian truth. A visionary with deep insight into the mysteries of Scripture, he represents, perhaps, the ideal Western man—steeped in the learning of the Roman society in which he lived and formed by the universal values and supreme wisdom bequeathed to that society by the Greek world. It thus seems wholly appropriate that his commentaries on Ezekiel should appear in the English language, being made available to Westerners in a language that has become the *lingua franca* of much of the Western world.

Bishop Chrysostomos  
Etna, California  
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THE HOMILIES OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT
On the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Translated by THEODOSIA GRAY

Ms. Gray's beautiful translation of St. Gregory the Great's homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel is the first English rendering of this important and profound theological work. If ever the ideal oxymoron were to be found, doubtless one of the prime candidates would be the words "easy reading" when applied to the writings of the Church Fathers. Whether Greek or Latin, the Fathers of the Church were largely men of letters, schooled in rhetoric, and given to a style of writing and logical exposition that is a challenge to the contemporary reader. Their thought processes are difficult to follow with ease, their logic is complex, and their writings are not "read," in the normal sense of the word, but "studied." Ms. Gray has not, in this excellent translation, tried to make the writings of St. Gregory something that they are not, as do some ugly and inaccurate contemporary renderings of the writings of the Church Fathers. A British scholar living in Sweden, she brings to her translation of St. Gregory's complex Latin a correspondingly eloquent English. Her sentence structure is complex. Her words provoke reflection. She has thus offered to an English-speaking audience the words of this renowned Church Father with a loyalty to the original Latin that is seldom found. She has found a treasure which she has not exploited, but has left whole and genuine, so that we might all benefit from it.

Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna

$12.95 (paperbound)
Saint Gregory the Great, pope from 590 to 604, considered the founder of the medieval papacy, which exercised both secular and spiritual power. Both a writer and a reformer, he was the fourth and final of the traditional Latin Fathers of the Church and expounded a sacramental spirituality. St. Gregory the Great depicted in a stained glass window at St. Michael & All Angels Church in Brinkworth, Wiltshire, England. © Fr James Bradley (CC BY 2.0). Realizing he could neither defeat the Lombards militarily nor continue a cycle of warfare and ransom, Gregory repeatedly sought peace. Christ is risen! Truly He is risen! The Resurrected Christ (detail from the icon of Christ appearing to St. Mary Magdalene and telling her: "Do not hold me") (Icon courtesy of www.eikonografos.com used with permission). Homily by St. Gregory the Theologian on Great and Holy Pascha "I. It is the Day of the Resurrection, and my Beginning has good auspices. Let us then keep the Festival with splendor, and let us embrace one another. Let us say Brethren, even to those who hate us; much more to those who have done or suffered anything out of love for us. [The text of this homily is here given according to MS. Gg. 3. 28 od the Camb. Univ. Lib. (C). The variants that are not marked are from MS. Bodl. 340 (=NE. F. 4. 10).] GrÄ"gÅ­rius sÅ¨ hÅlgâ%pÅpa, Engliscre Å°Å°ode apostol, on Å°isum andwerdan dÅlge, Ålfter menigfealdum gedeorfum and hÅlgum gecnyrdnyssum, Godes rÅ°ce gesÇ£liglÅ°ce ÅstÅ°h. HÅ° is rihtlÅ°ce Engliscre Å°Å°ode apostol, for Å°an Å°e hÅ° Å¼urh his rÇ£d and sande Å°s fram dÅ°olles biggengum Å°tbrÇ£d, and tÅ° Godes gelÅ°afan gebÅ°gde. Manega hÅlige bÅ°c cÅ°Å°aÅ° h The aim is always to follow Saint Gregory the Great as å°ce servants of the servants of God å°c whether in church or society. The Brotherhood communicates with the church in part through The Servant, a quarterly publication of meditations, homilies, poetry, theological reflection, criticism, and news of the community. The Rule and Custom of the Community. The Rule requires weekly participation å° daily if possible å° in celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, daily recitation of the fourfold office of The Book of Common Prayer, daily meditation, regular theological and biblical study, Embertide reports,