

## Early Christian Lives

*Life of Antony by Athanasius*

*Life of Paul of Thebes by Jerome*

*Life of Hilarion by Jerome*

*Life of Malchus by Jerome*

*Life of Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus*

*Life of Benedict by Gregory the Great*

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Life of Benedict is unusual in that it was not written as a self-contained work but forms the second book of Gregory's Dialogues, a work in four books<sup>1</sup> which aims to do for the saints of Italy<sup>2</sup> what Palladius and others had done for the saints of Egypt, and what Sulpicius Severus had done for St Martin of Gaul some two centuries earlier. The Dialogues were written by Pope Gregory I in 593 or 594, apparently at the request of some of his friends, who had urged him to write something on the subject of the miracles performed by recent Christians in Italy to show that God had not abandoned His people, even though it must have sometimes seemed like it in that period of catastrophes of all kinds.*

*Gregory, born in about 540, had been pope since 590. He grew up at the time of the invasions of the Goths and pursued a successful public career, as was expected of someone with his family credentials and excellent education, but renounced this way of life in order to live as an ascetic in Rome. However, it was not long before he was brought out of monastic retirement by the pope at the time: he ordained Gregory deacon and sent him on a mission to Constantinople to ask for military aid from the emperor. On his return some years later, Gregory withdrew to the monastery once more but continued to act as Pope Pelagius' secretary. When this pope died of the plague which was scourging Rome, Gregory was chosen as his successor, much against his will, for he hated to exchange the peace of the monastic life for the administrative burden of high office. Yet he proved himself to be a pope of great distinction at a time of crisis in Italy, and indeed was forced to take on the role of civil ruler to negotiate with the Lombards, who were now threatening to destroy Rome. Despite his official responsibilities he managed to write several major works,<sup>3</sup> as well as leaving over eight hundred letters which are the prime source for our knowledge of Gregory's life.*

The *Life of Benedict* differs from previous Christian biographies in that, in accordance with the subtitle of the *Dialogues*, it concentrates primarily on the miracles performed by St Benedict, at the expense of information about his teachings, his character or appearance. The dialogues of the title take place between Gregory and his deacon Peter: the miracle stories, of varying lengths, are interspersed with Peter's questions and Gregory's theological and scriptural reflections. The dialogue form had already been used in Greek and Latin literature by such writers as Plato, Cicero, Seneca and Tacitus, but took on a new lease of life in Christian literature when it was used for the defence of the faith against pagans, Jews or heretics,<sup>4</sup> for philosophical debate (as in the case of Augustine's early works written at Cassiciacum) and for more biographical – but still basically didactic – purposes, as in the case of the *Dialogues of Sulpicius Severus* and Palladius' *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom* at the beginning of the fifth century. It is with this latter category that Gregory's *Dialogues* have most in common.

Gregory's *Dialogues* soon reached a wider audience than the friends for whom it was originally written. In the west we find that writers such as Adomnan, in his *Life of St Columba*, and Bede, in his *Life of Cuthbert* and *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, were clearly familiar with the work. It was one of the works translated into Old English under King Alfred the Great, along with Gregory's *Pastoral Rule*. In the east the work was translated in the eighth century into Greek by Pope Zacharias, which enabled it to become known in the Byzantine world. The text of the *Dialogues* continued to be copied throughout the Middle Ages: it sometimes appeared as a whole but often, because of the importance of Benedict for the history of monasticism, the second book was copied on its own or together with the text of the *Rule of Benedict*. The very miracle stories which seem to have caused many modern readers to dismiss the work as unworthy of Gregory were what made the *Life of Benedict* so popular among medieval readers as an inspiration to the Christian life.

## LIFE OF BENEDICT BY GREGORY THE GREAT

## Prologue

There was a man whose life was worthy of veneration, Benedict by name and blessed by grace.<sup>1</sup> From his very childhood he possessed the wisdom of old age; his behaviour made him seem older than he was and he took no interest in sensual pleasures. While he still lived upon this earth, he despised as if it were dust the world and its splendour which he could have freely enjoyed for a time. Benedict came from a free-born family from the district of Nursia<sup>2</sup> and had been sent to Rome for a liberal education. But when he noticed that many students fell headlong into vice, he stepped back, as it were, just as he was about to enter the world, fearing that if any worldly knowledge should touch him, he, too, would then fall, body and soul, into the bottomless abyss. And so, after abandoning the study of literature and leaving his father's home and property, wishing to please God alone, he went in search of the habit of a holy way of life. He therefore withdrew, knowledgeably ignorant and wisely unlearned.

2 I do not know of all this man's deeds, but the few that I am going to describe I learned of from the account of four of his disciples, namely Constantine, an extremely respectable man who succeeded Benedict as the head of the monastery; Valentinian who was for many years in charge of the Lateran monastery; Simplicius, who was the third person to rule his community after him; and Honoratus who is still in charge now of the cell in which Benedict first lived.<sup>3</sup>



## Life of Benedict

1.1 And so, after abandoning his literary studies he decided to make for the solitary places, accompanied only by his nurse who loved him dearly. When they came to the place which is called Effide, many people from the nobility detained them there out of love. While they were staying at the church of St Peter, this nurse of his asked the neighbouring women if she could borrow a sieve to sift the chaff. She then carelessly left it lying on a table, and it happened to fall off and broke in two pieces. As soon as Benedict's nurse came back and found it, she burst into tears on seeing that the utensil that had been lent to her was broken.

2 When Benedict, who was a devout and affectionate boy, saw his nurse crying, he felt sorry for her in her grief: he took away with him both halves of the broken sieve and began to pray, in tears. When he got up from his prayer, he saw beside him the utensil in one piece: no mark was to be found on it to show where it had been broken. Then he tenderly reassured his nurse and gave her back the mended sieve which he had taken away in pieces. Everyone in that place got to hear of this and it was regarded with such awe that the inhabitants hung the sieve up at the entrance to the church so that all their contemporaries as well as future generations might know from what point of perfection the young boy Benedict had started on the grace of that way of life. For many years it remained there where everyone could see it, hanging above the doors of the church even to this day at the time of the Lombard invasions.

3 But Benedict was keen to experience the evils of the world more than its praises, to be exhausted by working hard on God's behalf more than to be exalted by the acclaim of this life. So he secretly ran away from his nurse and withdrew to a remote place called Subiaco, about forty miles from the city of Rome, where there are springs of cool, clear water: all this water first collects in a broad lake and then flows down into a river.

4 As he fled to this place, a monk called Romanus met him on his way and asked him where he was going. When he learned of Benedict's

plan, Romanus kept it secret and offered his assistance. He gave to Benedict the habit of the holy way of life and served him as best he could. When the man of God arrived there he made his home in a very cramped cave and stayed there for three years, unknown to anyone except the monk Romanus.

5 This man Romanus lived close by in a monastery under the rule of Father Adeodatus. But out of devotion he would steal away from this abbot of his and regularly bring Benedict bread which he had surreptitiously been able to smuggle out from his own rations. There was no path from Romanus' cell to this cave because of a high cliff projecting above it, but Romanus used to tie the bread to a very long rope and let it down from this cliff. He had also hung a little bell on this rope so that at the sound of the bell the man of God would know that Romanus was bringing him bread and that he should come out and fetch it. But the old enemy looked maliciously on Romanus' kindness and on Benedict's meal. One day when he saw the bread being lowered, he threw a stone at the bell and broke it. In spite of this, Romanus still continued to look after Benedict by appropriate means.

6 But the almighty God wanted Romanus to rest from his exertions and Benedict's life to be revealed as an example to men, so that the light placed on the candlestick might shine brightly and give light to all those in his house.<sup>4</sup> There was a priest living some distance away who had prepared himself a meal for the Easter celebrations. The Lord graciously appeared to this man in a vision, saying, 'You are preparing delicious food for yourself while my servant is tormented by hunger over there.' The priest got up at once and went to the place on Easter Day itself, taking the food that he had prepared for himself. He went looking for the man of God over steep mountains and through deep valleys and in the caverns in the earth until he found him hiding in his cave.

7 When they had prayed and blessed the almighty Lord, they sat down together and had a delightful conversation about their life. Then the priest who had come said, 'Come on, let us eat, for today it is Easter.' The man of God replied, 'I know that it is Easter, because I have been granted the privilege of seeing you.' He was certainly



isolated from people, seeing that he was unaware that it was Easter Day! Then the venerable priest stated it once more, saying, 'Today really is the day of the Lord's resurrection, Easter Day. It is not right for you to fast. I have been sent for this very reason, so that together we might partake of the gifts of the almighty Lord.' And so they thanked God and shared the food, and when the meal was over and they had finished conversing, the priest returned to his church.

8 At about this time some shepherds also found Benedict concealed in his cave. When they saw him through the bramble bushes, clothed in animal skins, they thought he was some wild beast, but when they came to know God's servant, many of them were transformed and their bestial mentality changed into the grace of devoutness. As a result Benedict's name became known to all throughout the neighbouring areas and it happened that from that time onwards he began to be visited by large numbers of people who brought him food for his body and from his lips took back the food of life in their hearts.

II One day, while he was alone, the tempter came to him. A little bird, commonly known as a blackbird, began to flutter around his head, coming up close to his face in such an insistent manner that the holy man could have caught it in his hand if he had wanted to. Instead he made the sign of the cross and the bird flew away. However, when it had gone, it was followed by a feeling of carnal temptation stronger than any the holy man had ever experienced. For the evil spirit presented to his mind's eye a woman whom he had seen some time earlier, and the sight of her set the soul of God's servant on fire, making it burn so violently that his heart could hardly contain the flame of passion. Benedict almost decided to abandon the wilderness, overcome by sensual pleasure.

2 Suddenly he was touched by heavenly grace and came to himself once more. Seeing some dense bushes with nettles and brambles growing near by, he took off his clothes and threw himself naked into those sharp thorns and stinging nettles. Rolling around in them for a long time, he emerged with sores and scratches all over his body. These wounds to his skin allowed him to remove the mental wound from his body by turning the pleasure to pain. The external pain served as a beneficial punishment for he thereby managed to extinguish

the fire burning sinfully within him; and so by transforming the fire he gained a victory over sin.

3 From that time onwards, as he himself later told his disciples, he managed to control the temptation of sexual pleasure so completely that he never experienced it in the slightest. Afterwards, many people began to abandon the world and to hasten to learn from him, for now that he was free from the vice of sexual temptation, it was right that he should become a teacher of virtue. That is why Moses orders that Levites should enter service from the age of twenty-five but from their fiftieth year they should become guardians of the vessels.<sup>5</sup>

4 PETER: I now have some understanding of this text but I would still like you to explain it more fully.

GREGORY: It is obvious, Peter, that when one is young the temptation of the flesh is at its strongest, but from one's fiftieth year the body's heat begins to cool. The sacred vessels are the minds of the faithful: that is why it is necessary for the chosen ones, while they are still victims of temptation, to be subordinate, to serve and tire themselves out in works of obedience; but after the heat of temptation has receded and the mind attains the peace of age, they are the guardians of the vessels for they then are made the teachers of souls.

5 PETER: Yes, I agree with what you say. But now that you have revealed the secrets of this particular text, I beg you to continue with the account you started on of the life of this just man.

III GREGORY: As temptation receded then, the man of God produced a more abundant harvest of virtues, now that he had, as it were, pulled out the weeds from the cultivated soil. As word of his exemplary life spread, his name became increasingly famous.

2 Near by there stood a monastery where the abbot of the community had died. The whole community came to the venerable Benedict and begged him, with earnest entreaties, to become their abbot. For a long time he refused and put them off, predicting that his way of life would not suit the brothers, but at last he had to yield to their entreaties and gave his consent.

3 In that monastery<sup>6</sup> Benedict preserved the life according to a rule, allowing no one, by unlawful behaviour, to turn aside to right or left from the path of the monastic life, as they had done previously. As a

result the brothers of whom he was in charge became insanely angry and began to accuse each other for having asked this man to be their abbot, since their deviant behaviour clashed with his standard of rectitude. When they saw that under his leadership unlawful things were no longer lawful, they were aggrieved at having to abandon their habits, for they found it hard that their minds, which were set in their ways, should be forced to think new things (for the life of the virtuous is always a burden to the wicked). As a result they tried to devise a means of killing him.

4 Having decided upon a plan, they put poison into his wine. When the glass vessel containing that deadly drink was offered to their abbot as he reclined at table so that he might bless it in accordance with monastic custom, Benedict stretched out his hand and made the sign of the cross: the goblet broke as soon as this sign was made, even though it was not within his reach. It shattered as if he had thrown a stone at this vessel of death instead of making the sign of the cross. The man of God understood at once that it had contained a deadly drink because it could not bear the sign of life. He got up immediately and with a calm expression and without any agitation he called the brothers together and addressed them, saying, 'May God almighty have pity on you, my brothers. Why do you wish to do this to me? Did I not say to you at the beginning that your ways and mine were incompatible? Go and seek an abbot for yourselves who suits your ways, because after this you definitely cannot have me.'

5 Then he returned to the place of his beloved solitude and lived with himself, alone in the sight of Him who watches from on high.

PETER: I am not really clear what is meant by the phrase 'he lived with himself'.

GREGORY: The way of life of those monks who had united to conspire against him was so completely different from his own that if the holy man had wished to force them to remain under his rule for a long time and against their will, he might perhaps have exceeded his strength and lost his peace and turned his mind's eye away from the light of contemplation. Each day, exhausted by their refusal to be corrected, he would have neglected his own affairs and might perhaps have abandoned himself without finding them. For whenever we are

taken outside ourselves by becoming excessively preoccupied, we remain ourselves but we are no longer with ourselves because we utterly fail to see ourselves as we wander all over the place.

6 Would we say that someone was with himself if he were to go away to a distant country where he spent part of the inheritance he had received and then had to hire himself out to one of the citizens, feeding the man's pigs and watching them munch acorns while he went hungry? When he then begins to think of the good things he has lost, it is about him that Scripture says, *Returning to himself, he said, How many workers there are in my father's house who have plenty of bread!*<sup>7</sup> If he were with himself, how could he return to himself?

7 I would therefore say that this venerable man lived with himself because he always kept watch over himself, always seeing himself in the Creator's eyes, constantly examining himself and not allowing his mind's eye to stray outside himself.

8 PETER: Then how about what is written concerning the apostle Peter when he had been led out of prison by the angel? *When he returned to himself, he said, Now I know for sure that the Lord sent his angel to snatch me from the hand of Herod and from every expectation of the Jewish people.*<sup>8</sup>

9 GREGORY: There are two ways, Peter, in which we are carried outside ourselves: either we fall beneath ourselves by some lapse of thought, or we are raised above ourselves by the grace of contemplation. So the man who fed the pigs fell beneath himself because his mind wandered and because of his filthiness, but he whom the angel released and whose mind was caught up into a state of ecstasy, was outside himself, certainly, but above himself. Both of them returned to themselves, the former when he came back to his senses from the error of his deed, the latter, when from the heights of contemplation he returned to his former, normal state of mind. And so the venerable Benedict lived with himself in solitude, in so far as he kept himself within the walls of his thought, but whenever the ardour of contemplation swept him up on high, he undoubtedly left himself beneath himself.

10 PETER: What you say is clear. But please answer this: was he right to abandon the brothers once he had taken charge of them?

GREGORY: In my opinion, Peter, bad men who have ganged up together ought to be endured with patience if there are some good men among them who can be helped. But when the fruit from good men is completely lacking, effort on behalf of the bad is sometimes wasted, especially if there exist sufficient opportunities for bringing better fruit to God. Who should the holy man have remained to protect, when he saw that they had all united to persecute him?

11 We should also mention what often happens in the mind of those who are perfect: when they see that their efforts are fruitless, they move elsewhere to find more fruitful work. This is the reason why that outstanding preacher<sup>9</sup> who longed to be released and to be with Christ, for whom to live was Christ and to die was profit,<sup>10</sup> who not only sought painful struggles for himself but also inspired others to endure similar things, after suffering persecution at Damascus, got hold of a basket and a rope so that he could escape and arranged for himself to be let down secretly.<sup>11</sup> Would we say that Paul feared death when he claims to be eager for it for the sake of Jesus' love?<sup>12</sup> No, but when he saw that his hard work was bearing less fruit there, he saved himself for more fruitful work elsewhere. God's fearless fighter refused to be imprisoned and went in search of battle in the open.

12 It was the same with the venerable Benedict: if you listen carefully, you will soon realize that in abandoning those who could not be taught and by remaining alive himself he was able to bring many others back to life from spiritual death.

PETER: Clear reason and the fitting evidence you have adduced prove that what you say is true. But I ask you to stop digressing and get back to your account of this great abbot's life.

13 GREGORY: As the holy man increased in virtues and miracles in this wilderness, he inspired many people to gather there to serve the almighty God – so many, in fact, that he built twelve monasteries there with the help of Jesus Christ, the almighty Lord. To each of these monasteries he assigned groups of twelve monks, as well as one abbot for each group. He did however keep a few monks with him, thinking that they would still benefit from his personal instruction.

14 At that time religious men from Roman noble families began to join him, too, and entrust their sons to him so that he might raise

them for the almighty Lord. Euthicius and the patrician Tertullus also handed over their offspring, Maurus and Placidus, on whom their hopes of good fortune rested. Of these two, Maurus<sup>13</sup> was slightly older, and as he was growing into a young man of fine character, he began to act as his master's assistant, while Placidus was still only child. IV In one of these monasteries that he had built all around that area was a monk who could not stand still to pray. As soon as the brothers had bent down to start praying, this man would go outside and engage in worldly and ephemeral activities, letting his thoughts wander. After being repeatedly told off by his abbot, he was taken to the man of God, who also rebuked him in strong terms for his foolishness. Returning to the monastery he could only just manage to hold fast to the admonition of the man of God for two days: on the third day he reverted to his usual practice and began to wander around when it was time for prayer.

2 The abbot of his monastery, whom Benedict had appointed, reported this to the servant of God who said, 'I will come and correct him myself.' So the man of God came to this monastery, and while the brothers were devoting themselves to prayer at the regular time, he saw that after the psalm-singing this monk who could not remain at prayer was being pulled outside by a little black boy<sup>14</sup> tugging at the fringe of his garment. Then Benedict whispered to the abbot of the monastery, who was called Pompeianus, and to Maurus, God's servant, 'Can you not see who is pulling this monk outside?' When they answered, 'No,' he said to them, 'Let us pray that you too might see whom this monk is following.' After praying for two days, the monk Maurus saw him, but Pompeianus, the abbot of the monastery, was unable to see him.

3 And so the next day, after the prayers were finished, the man of God went out of the chapel and found the monk standing outside. Benedict struck the man with his staff for being so spiritually blind and from that day on, the man no longer fell victim to the little black boy's persuasiveness. Instead, he was able to remain still during prayer: it was as if the old enemy had been beaten and no longer dared to try and control his thoughts.

V Among the monasteries that he had built in that area there were



three at the top of mountain cliffs. It was very hard for the brothers always to go down to the lake when they had to fetch water, especially since the steep mountainside meant that those who climbed nervously down it were in great danger. So a delegation of brothers from these three monasteries came to Benedict, God's servant, and said, 'It is difficult for us to go all the way down to the lake each day for water. The monasteries must therefore be moved from this site.'

2 Benedict gave them kind reassurances and sent them away. That same night he climbed the rocky mountain together with the little boy called Placidus whom I mentioned earlier. There he spent a long time in prayer and when he had finished praying, he placed three stones there to mark the spot. Then he returned to his monastery, unnoticed by anyone.

3 The following day, when these same brothers came back to him about the water they needed, he said, 'Go and make a little hollow in the rock where you find three stones piled on top of each other. The almighty God can produce water even on the top of that mountain to spare you the trouble of such an awkward descent.' They went and found the moisture already seeping out of the rock that Benedict had mentioned. When they had made a hollow in it, it was immediately filled with water welling up in such abundance that it flows even to this day, pouring down from the mountain top right to the bottom.

VI On another occasion a certain Goth, poor in spirit,<sup>15</sup> came to adopt that way of life and Benedict, the man of the Lord, welcomed him most warmly. One day Benedict ordered that this man should be given a metal tool (known as a bush-hook because of its similarity to a hook), so that he could cut away the thorn bushes in an area where they planned to create a garden. The place which the Goth had undertaken to clear was situated on the very edge of the lake. When the Goth attacked the thick brambles energetically, the metal tool shot out from the handle and fell into the lake where the water was so deep that there was now no hope of retrieving the hook.

2 On losing the tool, the Goth ran trembling with fear to the monk Maurus and reported what he had lost and apologized for his carelessness. The monk Maurus took care immediately to inform Benedict, the servant of God. On hearing this, Benedict, the man of

the Lord, went to the spot, took the handle from the Goth's hand and plunged it into the lake: immediately the metal tool came up from the deep and fitted into the handle. Benedict gave the iron tool back to the Goth straight away, saying, 'Here you are. Get on with your work now. There is no need to be upset.'

VII One day when the venerable Benedict was keeping to his cell, Placidus, the boy I mentioned earlier who was one of the holy man's monks, went out to fetch water from the lake. Lowering the bucket he was holding into the water without due care, he overbalanced and fell in after it. The current immediately took hold of him and dragged him into the middle, almost an arrow's flight away from the bank. Although the man of God was inside his cell, he realized at once what had happened and quickly called Maurus, saying, 'Run, brother Maurus. That boy who went to fetch water has fallen into the lake and the current is already carrying him away.'

2 Then a remarkable thing happened which no one had experienced since the apostle Peter: after asking for a blessing and receiving it, Maurus, at the abbot's command, ran swiftly right to the place where the boy was being swept away by the current. Although he thought he was running on land he was actually moving over the surface of the water. He grabbed the boy by his hair and ran back, still at great speed. As soon as he reached the bank, he came to himself and, looking behind him, he realized that he had run over the water. He would never have dared to do this! He trembled with shock at what he had done.

3 Maurus went back to his abbot and told him what had happened. Benedict, that venerable man, tried to attribute this not to his own merits but to Maurus' obedience, but Maurus took the opposite view. He said that this had happened solely as a result of Benedict's order and that he himself had no part in a miracle he had performed without even knowing it. Then the boy who had been saved came forward to arbitrate in this friendly dispute in which both parties were vying for humility. He said, 'When I was pulled out of the water I saw the abbot's sheepskin cloak above my head and I watched him pull me from the waters.'

4 PETER: These are certainly very impressive things that you are

recounting: they will serve to edify many people. However, I find that the more I drink the miracles of this good man, the thirstier I become.

VIII GREGORY: The people of this area for miles around were now fervent in their love of the Lord God, Jesus Christ. Many abandoned the secular life and bent their spiritual neck beneath the light yoke<sup>16</sup> of the redeemer. But wicked men have a tendency to be jealous of others' virtue which they cannot be bothered to strive for themselves. And so it happened that a priest of the neighbouring church, Florentius by name (the grandfather of our subdeacon Florentius), was smitten by the malice of the old enemy and began to envy the holy man's devotion, to denigrate his way of life and, as far as he was able, to keep visitors away from Benedict.

2 When Florentius realized that he could not stop Benedict's progress and that the reputation of his way of life was growing and that many were continually being called to a better life as his reputation spread, the flames of jealousy burned all the more within him. For he longed for the praise which Benedict's way of life brought him but he was not willing to lead a life worthy of praise. Blinded by this dark jealousy, he went so far as to poison the bread he gave to the servant of the almighty God for a blessing. The man of God took it with thanks but the poison hidden in the bread was not hidden from him.

3 At mealtimes a raven used to come out of the nearby wood and take bread from Benedict's hand. This time, when it came as usual, the man of God threw down in front of the raven the bread that the priest had handed him, saying, 'In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, take this bread and drop it somewhere where no one can find it.' Then the raven, opening its beak wide and spreading its wings, began to run around the bread, cawing, as if to indicate that it wanted to obey but was unable to carry out the order. Again and again the man of God told him to do it, saying, 'Pick it up, pick it up. Do not be afraid. Just drop it where it cannot be found.' After hesitating a long time, the raven took the bread in its beak, picked it up and flew away. Three hours later it came back, after having thrown the bread away, and received its usual ration from the hands of the man of God.

4 Then the venerable father, seeing that the priest burned with a desire to kill him, grieved for him more than for himself. But as this man Florentius could not kill his master's body, he was fired with a determination to destroy the souls of Benedict's disciples. And so, before their very eyes, he sent seven naked girls into the garden of the cell where Benedict was to be found: holding hands, these girls danced for a long time in front of the disciples so as to inflame their minds with degrading lust.

5 The saintly man saw this from his cell and feared greatly that those disciples who were still young would succumb. As he understood that this was all aimed at him alone, he let envy have its way. In all the places of prayer that he had built he appointed priors for the groups of brothers, and together with a few monks whom he took with him, he moved his place of residence.

6 But as soon as the man of God had, by his humility, managed to escape Florentius' hatred, the almighty God struck this man in a terrible manner. While the priest was standing on the terrace, rejoicing at the news of Benedict's departure, the terrace on which he was standing collapsed, crushing and killing Benedict's enemy while the rest of the house remained undamaged.

7 Maurus, the man of God's disciple, thought that this ought to be reported immediately to the venerable father Benedict who was still only ten miles away. He sent a message saying, 'Come back, for the priest who was persecuting you has been killed.' When Benedict the man of God heard this, he began to sob with grief, either because his enemy was dead or because his disciple was exulting over his enemy's death. And so he imposed a penance on this disciple because he had dared to rejoice when sending news of his enemy's death.

8 PETER: What you say is amazing – quite astonishing! For in the water pouring from the rock I see Moses,<sup>17</sup> in the iron which came back from the depths of the water I see Elisha,<sup>18</sup> in the walking on water I see Peter,<sup>19</sup> in the obedience of the raven I see Elijah,<sup>20</sup> and in the grief at the death of his enemy I see David.<sup>21</sup> In my estimation, Benedict was filled with the spirit of all just men.

9 GREGORY: Actually, Peter, Benedict the man of the Lord possessed

the spirit of only one person, of Him who has filled the hearts of all the elect by granting them the grace of the redemption. John said of Him, *He was the true light who illuminates every man coming into this world*,<sup>22</sup> and it is also written of Him, *Of his fullness we have all received*.<sup>23</sup> For the holy men of God might possess special powers from the Lord but they could not grant them to others. But He who grants the signs of special power to the humble is He who promised His enemies that he would give them the sign of Jonah.<sup>24</sup> He was willing to die in the presence of the proud and rise again in the presence of the humble with the result that the former saw in Him something to despise and the latter saw something they had to love and venerate. As a result of this mystery it happened that while the proud see the contempt of death, the humble on the other hand receive the glory of power over death.

IO PETER: Please tell me now where the saint moved to and whether he displayed any miraculous powers there.

GREGORY: When the saint moved, he changed his place but not his enemy. For after this the battles he endured were all the harder because he found himself fighting openly against the master of evil in person. The fortification known as Casinum<sup>25</sup> is situated on the side of a high mountain which holds Casinum in a broad pocket and then stretches its summit, as it were, towards the sky: the distance from the fortification to the summit is three miles. There was a very old shrine there where Apollo was worshipped by the foolish country folk in accordance with ancient pagan practice. Around the shrine a grove of trees had grown up, also consecrated to the demons, and here, even at this time, large numbers of pagans in their madness used to expend great effort on their sacrilegious sacrifices.

11 When the man of God arrived there he smashed the statue, overturned the altar and cut down the grove. In the temple of Apollo itself he built a shrine to St Martin<sup>26</sup> and where the altar of Apollo had stood he built a shrine to St John, and by preaching ceaselessly he called to the faith all those living in the vicinity.

12 But the old enemy could not endure this in silence and so he appeared before the eyes of the abbot, not secretly or in a dream but in a clear vision. With loud cries he complained that he was being

attacked: even the brothers could hear his words although they were utterly unable to see his shape. As the venerable abbot reported to his disciples, this old enemy appeared to his bodily eyes in a most hideous shape, all on fire, looking as if he were launching a ferocious assault on Benedict, his mouth and eyes shooting flames. Everyone could hear what he was saying. First he called Benedict by name, and when the man of God made no reply, he immediately started to abuse him. When he shouted 'Benedict, Benedict,' and saw that Benedict would not answer, he then added, 'Cursed, not blessed!<sup>27</sup> What have you got to do with me? Why are you persecuting me?'

13 But now we must expect new attacks by the old enemy on the servant of God. The devil, wishing to wage war against Benedict, against his will provided him with opportunities for victory.

IX One day as the brothers were building rooms at this monastery, they found a stone lying in the middle which they decided to use for their building. When two or three of the monks found it impossible to move it, more of them came to help but the stone remained immovable, as if it were rooted to the ground. It was obvious, then, that the old enemy was sitting on it in person, seeing that the hands of such strong men were unable to move it. Faced with this difficulty, they sent a message to the man of God, asking him to come and drive the enemy away by means of prayer, so that they could lift the stone. Benedict came at once and when he had said a prayer and given a blessing, the stone was lifted so quickly that it was as if it had never been weighted down.

X Then the man of God decided that they should dig the soil at that spot. On digging down quite deep, the brothers discovered a bronze idol there. They threw it into the kitchen for the time being: at once fire appeared to shoot out and it seemed to all the monks that the whole kitchen building would burn down.

2 As they attempted desperately to put the fire out by throwing water on it, the man of the Lord arrived, alerted by all the noise. He realized that this fire existed in the eyes of the brothers but not in his own. He immediately bowed his head in prayer and restored the sight of those brothers whom he found to be deceived by the imaginary fire, so that they could perceive that the kitchen building was standing



intact, instead of seeing the flames which were an illusion created by the old enemy.

XI Another time, the brothers were working on a wall which needed to be made a little higher, as circumstances demanded. The man of God remained within the walls of his tiny cell, spending his time in prayer. The old enemy appeared to him, taunting him, and indicated that he was going to visit the brothers at their work. The man of God quickly sent a messenger to the brothers to warn them, saying, 'Be careful, brothers! An evil spirit is on its way to you at this moment.' The messenger had hardly finished speaking when the evil spirit knocked down the wall that was being built. As it collapsed it crushed a young monk, the son of a decurion. They were all very upset and deeply shocked, not by the collapse of the wall but because their brother had been crushed. In profound sorrow they hastened to report this to their venerable abbot Benedict.

2 Then the abbot gave orders for the injured boy to be brought to him. They could only carry him in a cloak because the stones from the collapsed wall had crushed not only his arms and legs but all his bones. The man of God told them to bring the boy into his cell and put him straight away on the *psiathium* (in other words, the rush mat) on which Benedict used to pray. He then told the brothers to go outside, closed the door and lay down to pray with even greater intensity than usual. Then something marvellous happened: in the very same hour he sent this boy, now recovered and as healthy as before, back to his work so that he could help the brothers to finish the wall, even though the old enemy had thought he could insult Benedict by causing this boy's death.

3 At this period the man of God began to have the power of the spirit of prophecy, to predict the future and to report to those who were present what was happening far away.

XII It was the custom at the monastery for the brothers not to eat or drink anything whenever they went on some errand outside the monastery and this rule was strictly observed. One day the brothers went out on an errand and were forced to stay out until rather late. They decided to stop off at the home of a devout woman; so they entered her home and had a meal there.

2 Returning to the monastery a bit later, they sought their father's blessing as usual. He immediately asked them, 'Where did you eat?', to which they answered, 'Nowhere.' 'Why are you lying like this?' he said. 'Did you not go into such and such a woman's hut? Did you not receive such and such food? Did you not have this many drinks?' When the venerable father gave them specific details of the woman's hospitality, the kinds of food and the number of drinks, they recalled everything they had done and fell trembling at his feet, confessing their guilt. He immediately forgave them, knowing that they would not in future do such things in his absence, now that they knew that he was present with them in spirit.

XIII The brother of his monk Valentinian, whom I mentioned earlier,<sup>28</sup> was a layman but a devout one. Every year he used to come from his home to the monastery without having eaten anything, so as to receive a prayer from the servant of God and to see his brother. One day, on his way to the monastery, he was joined by a fellow traveller who was carrying food to eat on the journey. As it was now getting rather late, this man said, 'Come on, brother, let us have some food, so that we do not get tired on the way.' The other man answered, 'Certainly not, brother. I will not do so because it is my custom always to come to see the venerable father Benedict without having eaten anything.' On receiving this answer, his fellow traveller was quiet for a while.

2 But later, when they had gone a little further on their journey, he again suggested that they should eat. However, the one who had decided to arrive without having eaten anything refused, and the one who had invited him to eat said nothing, agreeing to go a little further still without eating. They continued on their journey but then, as it was getting late, the walkers began to get tired. Along their route they came across a meadow and a spring – everything which gave the impression of offering delightful refreshment. Then the fellow traveller said, 'Look, here is water, here is a meadow. This is a lovely spot where we can be refreshed and rest a while. Then we will be able to finish our journey in good shape.' As these words pleased his ears and the place pleased his eyes, Valentinian's brother was persuaded by this third invitation: he consented and joined his companion in a meal.

3 In the evening he arrived at the monastery. When he was brought into the presence of the venerable father Benedict, he asked for a prayer for himself. But at once the saint reproached him for what he had done on the way, saying, 'What is the matter, brother? The malicious enemy who spoke to you in the person of your fellow traveller could not persuade you the first time, nor the second, but the third time he persuaded you and made you do what he wanted.' Then the man admitted his guilt, caused by his weakness. He threw himself down at Benedict's feet and began to weep for the wrong he had done, feeling all the more ashamed because he realized that he had done wrong in front of father Benedict's eyes, even though he was far away.

4 PETER: I see that the saint's heart contained the spirit of Elisha, since he was present to his disciple even when he was far away.<sup>29</sup>

GREGORY: You must be quiet for the moment, Peter, so that you can hear about even more wonderful things.

XIV At the time of the Goths, their king Totila heard that the holy man possessed the spirit of prophecy, and so he set off for Benedict's monastery.<sup>30</sup> He stopped at some distance from it and sent a message to Benedict to say that he was coming. Immediately an order came back from the monastery that he should come, but Totila, being of a devious mentality, tried to test whether the man of the Lord really possessed the spirit of prophecy. He gave his boots to one of his guards, who was called Riggo, and made him dress up in his royal robes. He then ordered him to go to the man of God as if he himself were the king. As Riggo's attendants, Totila sent three counts who were closer to him than any others, namely Vult, Ruderic and Blidin. They were to walk beside Riggo while the servant of God was watching so as to maintain the pretence that Riggo was king Totila. He also added other trappings of power as well as more guards so that both the trappings and the purple garments might make Benedict believe that this man was the king.

2 When Riggo, dressed in these splendid garments and accompanied by a large number of attendants, entered the monastery, the man of God was seated at some distance. He saw Riggo approaching and as soon as he was within earshot he called out, 'Take off what you are

wearing, my son, take it off. It does not belong to you.' At once Riggo fell to the ground, terrified at having dared to try to trick such a great man. All those who were coming to see the man of God with him were thrown to the ground in terror. Getting up again they dared not go any closer to him but returned to their king. Trembling with fear they told Totila how quickly they had been discovered.

XV Totila then went in person to see the man of God. Seeing him seated some distance away, Totila dared not approach him but threw himself to the ground. Two or three times the man of God said to him, 'Get up,' but Totila did not dare to get up from the ground and stand upright in front of him. So Benedict, the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, was himself humble enough to approach the king, who was lying on the ground. He raised Totila up and then rebuked him for what he had done and in a few words foretold everything that would happen to him, saying, 'You do much wrong, you have done much wrong: now at last put a stop to your wicked behaviour. You will enter Rome, you will cross the sea, you will reign for nine years and in the tenth year you will die.'

2 On hearing this, the king was terribly frightened. He asked for a prayer and then departed and from that time onwards he behaved with less cruelty. Not long afterwards he reached Rome and went on to Sicily and in the tenth year of his reign, by the judgement of the almighty God, he lost his kingdom together with his life.<sup>31</sup>

3 Moreover, the bishop of the church at Canosa<sup>32</sup> used to come and visit this servant of the Lord, and the man of God loved him very much on account of his virtuous life. While the bishop was discussing with Benedict king Totila's entry into Rome and the destruction of that city,<sup>33</sup> he said, 'The king is going to destroy that city and render it uninhabitable.' But Benedict replied, 'Rome will not be destroyed by the pagans. Instead it will be devastated by storms, by lightning, whirlwinds and earthquakes, and as a result it will fade away.' The mysteries of his prophecy have become clearer to us than the light of day, for in this city we see walls crumbling, houses demolished, the churches destroyed by a whirlwind, and its buildings, weakened by great age, lying on the ground in spreading ruins.

4 However, his disciple Honoratus,<sup>34</sup> from whom I learnt this, states

that he did not himself hear it from Benedict but claims that the brothers told him that Benedict had said this.

XVI At about the same time a cleric at the church of Aquinum<sup>35</sup> was being tormented by a demon. The venerable Constantius, bishop of that church, had sent him to visit many martyrs' shrines to find a cure, but the holy martyrs of God refused to grant him the gift of health, for they wanted to reveal how great the grace in Benedict was. And so the cleric was taken to Benedict, the servant of the almighty God, who poured forth prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ and managed to drive out the old enemy there and then from the man who was possessed. When he had been cured, Benedict ordered him, 'Go, and from now on do not eat meat and never dare to advance to holy orders. The day you dare to violate a holy order, you will immediately find yourself in Satan's power once more.'

2 And so the cleric went away cured, and for a time he kept the man of God's commandments (for a recent punishment tends to fill the mind with terror). But after several years, when all his elders had departed this life and he saw that those who were younger than him were being promoted before him in holy orders, he ceased to respect the man of God's words as if the passing of time had caused them to be forgotten, and he was ordained. At once the devil who had left him seized him again and continued to torment him until he had driven out his soul.<sup>36</sup>

3 PETER: As I see it, this man Benedict penetrated even the secrets of divinity, for he understood that this cleric had been handed over to the devil so as to prevent him entering a holy order.

GREGORY: How could he not have known the secrets of divinity seeing that he kept the divinity's commandments? For it is written, *He who is united to the Lord is one spirit.*<sup>37</sup>

4 PETER: If he who keeps close to the Lord becomes one spirit with the Lord, why is it that the same outstanding preacher also said, *Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counsellor?*<sup>38</sup> For it seems very odd not to know the mind of the person with whom one becomes one.

5. GREGORY: In so far as holy men are one with the Lord, they do know the mind of the Lord. For this same Apostle also said, *For what*

*man knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is within him? Similarly no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the spirit of God.*<sup>39</sup> So as to show that he knew the thoughts of God, he added, *But we have received not the spirit of this world but the spirit which is from God,*<sup>40</sup> and he also said, *What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him, He has revealed to us through His spirit.*<sup>41</sup>

6 PETER: If then the thoughts of God were revealed to this Apostle through the spirit of God, how come he said, before the passage I quoted just now, *How deep are the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgements and how inscrutable His ways?*<sup>42</sup> But as I say this, another problem occurs to me. For the prophet David speaks to the Lord, saying, *With my lips I have declared all the judgements of your mouth,*<sup>43</sup> and since it is a greater achievement to declare one's knowledge than merely to possess it, why is it that Paul stated that the judgements of God are incomprehensible, but David claims not only to know all these things but even to have declared them with his lips?

7 GREGORY: I have just given a brief answer to both these points, when I said that holy men are aware of the Lord's thoughts in so far as they are with the Lord. All who follow the Lord with devotion are, by means of their devotion, with God, but as they are still oppressed by the weight of corruptible flesh they are not with God. They know the hidden judgements of God, therefore, in so far as they are joined to Him, but in so far as they are separated from Him, they do not know them. The fact that they do not yet penetrate His secrets fully shows that His judgements are incomprehensible; but because their minds are united to Him, by dwelling on the words of holy Scripture or on such secret revelations as they may receive, they understand them, and know these things and declare them. And so the judgements which God does not utter they do not know but those which God speaks forth they do know.

8 That is why the prophet David, after he had said, *With my lips I have declared all the judgements,* immediately added, *of your mouth,* as if he were really saying, 'I could have known and declared those judgements which I knew you had spoken. For those which you



yourself had not spoken, you undoubtedly conceal from our minds.' And so the prophet's view is in agreement with that of the Apostle because the judgements of God are incomprehensible, and yet, those which have been uttered from his mouth can be declared by human lips. For the things that are spoken by God can be known by men but those which are concealed cannot be known.

9 PETER: In dealing with my little query your reasoning has made the whole thing clear. But if there are any more miracles of this man left, please go on.

XVII GREGORY: A nobleman named Theopropus had been converted as a result of father Benedict's admonishments. He was trusted by Benedict and enjoyed familiarity with him on account of his virtuous life. One day when this man entered Benedict's tiny cell, he found him weeping bitterly. He waited quietly for a long time but when he realized that Benedict's tears would not cease and that the man of God was not weeping in prayer, as he normally did, but in grief, he asked what the reason was for his great unhappiness. The man of God immediately answered, 'This whole monastery that I built and everything that I made for the brothers has been handed over to the pagans according to a judgement of the almighty God. It is with difficulty that I have managed to obtain permission to remove the souls from this place.'

2 The prophecy which Theopropus heard at that time we see fulfilled, for we know that Benedict's monastery has been destroyed by the Lombards. During the night, while the brothers were asleep, the Lombards recently entered it and plundered everything.<sup>44</sup> However, they were unable to capture a single person, for almighty God carried out His promise to His faithful servant Benedict. He had promised that if Benedict handed the possessions over to the barbarians, He would protect the souls. In this matter, I see that Benedict was in the same position as Paul, who received the life of all his companions as a consolation when his ship lost all its cargo.<sup>45</sup>

XVIII On another occasion, our friend Exhilaratus whom you have known since his conversion, was sent by his master to bring to the man of God at his monastery two wooden vessels full of wine, commonly known as casks. He brought one, but hid the other one

on his way. However, nothing that happened far away could escape the notice of the man of God, so he accepted the one flask with thanks, but as the boy was leaving he warned him, 'Be careful, my boy, not to drink from the hidden cask. Tip it up carefully and you will find what is inside.' Deeply embarrassed, the boy left the man of God. On his way back, wishing to test the truth of what he had been told, he tipped the cask up, and at once a snake slipped out of it. Seeing what he had found in the wine, this boy Exhilaratus was horrified at the wicked thing he had done.

XIX Not far from the monastery there was a village, where a large number of the inhabitants had been converted from the worship of idols to faith in God as a result of Benedict's admonishments. There were also some nuns there and Benedict, God's servant, took the trouble to send his brothers there regularly to give them spiritual encouragement. One day, he sent someone as usual but the monk whom he sent, after he had advised the nuns, was asked by them to accept a few handkerchiefs which he hid inside his tunic. As soon as he returned home, the man of God began to reproach him severely, saying, 'How has iniquity entered into your bosom?' The man was speechless with surprise because he had forgotten what he had done and could not understand why he was being chastised. So Benedict said to him, 'Was I not present when you received the handkerchiefs from the handmaidens of God and put them inside your tunic?' The monk immediately threw himself at Benedict's feet: he repented of his folly and pulled out the handkerchiefs hidden inside his tunic.

XX One day, the venerable abbot was taking bodily nourishment, and now that evening had come, one of his monks (the son of a high-ranking official) was holding the lamp for him at the table. The one in charge of the lamp was standing beside the man of God as he was eating, and he began to reflect in a spirit of pride, saying to himself, 'Who is this man, that I should have to stand beside him while he eats, and hold his lamp and work as his servant?' At once the man of God turned to him and began to reproach him severely, saying, 'Make the sign of the cross on your heart, brother! What is this that you are saying? Make the sign of the cross on your heart!' Benedict immediately called the brothers, told them to take the lamp

from the monk's hands and ordered him to relinquish his task and to go that very moment and sit quietly by himself. When the brothers asked him what had been going on in this man's heart, Benedict gave them a detailed account of how the monk had become puffed up with the spirit of pride and how he had silently murmured in his thoughts against the man of God. It then became evident to everyone that nothing could escape the notice of the venerable Benedict, whose ear had heard the thoughts of the mind.

XXI On another occasion a famine struck that region of Campania,<sup>46</sup> and everyone was suffering as a result of a severe shortage of food. They had already run out of grain in Benedict's monastery and almost all the loaves of bread had been eaten – no more than five could be found for the brothers at dinner-time. When the venerable abbot saw them looking unhappy, he made an effort to correct their lack of faith by reproaching them a little, and to cheer them up by means of a promise. He said, 'Why is your mind saddened by a lack of bread? Today there is indeed little, but tomorrow you will have plenty.'

2 The following day two hundred measures of flour, sent by the almighty God, were found in sacks in front of the monastery gates although even now no one knows who brought it there. When the brothers saw it, they gave thanks to the Lord for they had now learned not to lose faith in God's generosity, even in times of shortage.

3 PETER: Tell me, please: are we to believe that this servant of God always possessed the spirit of prophecy or was it only occasionally that the spirit of prophecy filled his mind?

GREGORY: The spirit of prophecy, Peter, does not always illumine the minds of the prophets because, just as it says of the Holy Spirit, *it breathes where it wills*;<sup>47</sup> so we must also understand that it inspires when it wills. That is why when Nathan was asked by the king if he could build the temple, he first agreed and later refused.<sup>48</sup> That is why Elisha, seeing the woman crying and not knowing why, said to the boy who was trying to make her stop, *Leave her alone. Her soul is bitterly distressed and the Lord has concealed it from me and has not revealed it to me*.<sup>49</sup>

4 The almighty God arranges it in this way according to the dispensation of His great love, for by sometimes granting the spirit of

prophecy and sometimes taking it away, He raises the minds of those who prophesy up to the heights and He also keeps them in humility. In this way, when they receive the spirit they discover what they are from God, and then when they no longer possess the spirit of prophecy, they learn what they are by themselves.

5 PETER: These are convincing arguments making it evident that things are as you claim. But please tell me anything else that occurs to you about the venerable abbot Benedict.

XXII GREGORY: On another occasion he was asked by a devout man to send some of his disciples to build a monastery on this man's estate near the town of Terracino.<sup>50</sup> Benedict agreed to his request: he chose some brothers, appointed an abbot and decided who would be their prior. As they departed, he gave them a promise, saying, 'Go now, and on such and such a day I will come and show you where you ought to build your chapel, the brothers' refectory, the guest-house and all the necessary buildings.' As soon as they had received this blessing they set off, and waiting impatiently for the appointed day, they made all the necessary preparations for those who might come with this wonderful abbot.

2 On the very night before the appointed day dawned, the man of the Lord appeared in a dream both to that servant of God whom he had appointed as abbot in that place, and to his prior, giving them a detailed description of all the different places where they were supposed to build something. When the two of them rose from their sleep, they told each other what they had seen, but because they did not entirely trust the vision, they awaited the arrival of the man of God in accordance with his promise.

3 When the man of God failed to arrive on the appointed day, they were very upset. They went back to him, saying, 'Father, we waited for you to come as you promised, and to show us where we ought to build, but you did not come.' He said to them, 'Brothers, why do you say this? Did I not come as I promised?' When they asked him, 'When did you come?' he answered, 'Did I not appear to both of you while you were asleep and describe all the places? Go and build all the monastery buildings just as you heard them described in the vision.' They were utterly amazed when they heard this, and returning

to the estate I mentioned earlier, they constructed all the buildings exactly as they had been told in the vision.

4 PETER: I would like to know how it could have happened that he went a long way to give them a reply which they heard and understood in a vision while they were asleep.

GREGORY: What is it, Peter, that you hope to gain by examining the order of events? It is obvious that the spirit is of a more mobile nature than the body. Moreover, we certainly know from Scripture that the prophet<sup>51</sup> who was lifted up in Judea was suddenly put down in Chaldea together with his meal. When he had given the prophet Daniel the meal, Habakkuk suddenly found himself back in Judea.<sup>52</sup> If Habakkuk, then, was able in one moment to travel so far in his body to transport a meal, is it surprising that father Benedict managed to move in the spirit to bring the necessary information to the spirits of the sleeping monks? Just as Habakkuk moved in the body in order to bring food for the body, so Benedict moved spiritually in order to promote the spiritual life.

PETER: The hand of your speech has, I admit, wiped away the doubts from my mind. But I would like to know what kind of man he was in his everyday speech.

XXIII GREGORY: Even his everyday speech was not devoid of miraculous power, for if a man's heart is fixed on the things above, the words that issue from his mouth are in no way worthless. If in fact he ever said anything not decisively but as a threat, his words had such power that it seemed as if he had pronounced them not in a hesitant or conditional manner but as if he were giving an official judgement.

2 Let me give you an example: not far from his monastery there were two religious women, born of noble families, living in their own house. A devout man offered these women his services to assist them in their daily chores. However, as often happens, nobility of family brings with it inferiority of soul: those who are conscious that they have been more important than others, are less likely to consider themselves of little value in this world. These religious women had not been completely successful in using the bridle of their way of life to restrain their tongue and so their careless speech frequently pro-

voked to anger this devout man who was offering his services for the daily chores.

3 After putting up with this for a long time he went to the man of God and told him all the insults he was having to endure. When the man of God heard about these women's behaviour, he immediately sent them a message, saying, 'Curb your tongues, for if you do not change, I will excommunicate you.' He did not actually impose this sentence of excommunication, but threatened it.

4 However, those women did not change their old habits and a few days later they died and were buried in the church. While the solemn mass was being celebrated in this church and the deacon was calling out, 'If anyone is not in communion, let him withdraw,' as was the custom, the women's nurse, who had been in the habit of bringing an offering to the Lord on their behalf, saw them come out of their tombs and leave the church. When she noticed on several occasions that they went outside at the sound of the deacon's announcement, and that they were unable to stay inside the church, she remembered the message that the man of God had sent them while they were still alive. Had he not said that he would bar them from communion if they did not improve their manners and their language?

5 Deeply upset, she told this to the servant of God, who immediately gave her an offering with his own hand, saying, 'Go and present this offering to the Lord on their behalf, and afterwards they will no longer be excommunicated.' When the offering had been presented on their behalf and the deacon called out as usual that those who were not in communion should leave the church, these women were no longer seen to leave the church. From this it was evident that as they no longer withdrew with those who were barred from communion, they had received communion from the Lord through the servant of the Lord.

6 PETER: I find it quite extraordinary that a man, even one who is venerable and very holy, could, while still living in this corruptible flesh, release souls which had already been brought before that invisible judge.

GREGORY: Peter, was he who was told, *Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what you release on earth will also be released*



*in heaven*<sup>53</sup> not still in this flesh? Saint Peter's power to bind and release is now in the hands of those who, on account of their faith and good character, are his representatives in holy government. But in order that man on earth might have such power, the Creator of heaven and earth came down to earth from heaven; so that the flesh might even be able to judge the spirits, God in His humble generosity was made flesh for mankind. Our weakness was able to rise above itself because the strength of God had become weak beneath itself.<sup>54</sup>

7 PETER: Your reasoning is consistent with the miracles performed.

XXIV GREGORY: One day one of his monks, a little boy who loved his parents more than he should have, left the monastery without a blessing<sup>55</sup> and set off for their house. On that same day, as soon as he reached them, he died. The day after he had been buried, his body was found thrown out of the grave. They buried the body carefully once more but the following day they found it thrown out again, unburied as before.

2 Then they ran in panic to the feet of father Benedict and begged him amid much weeping to be kind enough to bestow his grace on the boy. At once the man of God gave them, with his own hand, the communion of the Lord's body, saying, 'Go and place the Lord's body on his chest and bury him like that.' As soon as this was done, the earth retained the boy's body and did not throw it out again. You can appreciate, Peter, what merit this man possessed in the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that the earth itself threw out the body of someone who did not have Benedict's grace.

PETER: I certainly can! I am utterly amazed.

XXV GREGORY: One of his monks became obsessed with moving and did not want to remain in the monastery. The man of God rebuked him constantly and admonished him frequently but he absolutely refused to stay in the community and insisted relentlessly on being released. So one day the venerable father, worn out by this man's nagging, angrily told him to leave.

2 Hardly had he left the monastery when he came upon a dragon confronting him on the road with gaping jaws. When this dragon that had appeared looked as if it were going to devour him, the monk

began to shout in a loud voice, trembling and shaking, saying, 'Help, help, a dragon is going to eat me!' When the brothers came running they could see no dragon but they led the trembling and shaking monk back to the monastery. He immediately promised that he would never leave the monastery and from that moment on he kept his promise. It was as a result of the holy man's prayers that the monk had been able to see in front of him a dragon that had earlier been leading him without him seeing it.

XXVI I think I ought also to mention what I learnt from the illustrious Aptonius. He told me that his father's slave boy was stricken with elephantiasis, causing his hair to fall out and his skin to become swollen; and he was unable to conceal the increasing amount of pus. Aptonius' father sent the boy to the man of God who instantly restored him to his former health.

XXVII I should also mention what his disciple, by the name of Peregrinus, told me. One day a man of faith, driven by the difficulty of repaying a debt, came to believe that there was but one remedy for him, namely to go to the man of God and tell him of the difficulties caused by the debt oppressing him. So he went to the monastery, found the servant of God almighty and revealed to him that he was being hard pressed by his creditor for the sum of twelve gold pieces. The venerable abbot replied that he certainly did not have twelve gold pieces, but he reassured him in his financial difficulties with kind words, saying, 'Go away and come back in two days, for today I have nothing to give you.'

2 During these two days Benedict spent his time praying as usual. On the third day when the debtor returned, thirteen gold pieces were suddenly found on top of the monastery's chest which was filled with grain. The man of God gave the order for the money to be removed and given to the unfortunate petitioner, telling him to use twelve of them to pay his debt and to keep one for personal expenses.

3 But now let me return to the things I learnt from the account of those of his disciples whom I mentioned at the beginning of the book. A man was suffering from severe jealousy of his enemy: his hatred had reached the point where, unbeknown to the enemy, he put poison in his drink. Although this did not kill him, it did change the

colour of his skin in such a way that blotches, resembling leprosy, spread over his body. But when this man was brought to the man of God, he quickly recovered his former health, for as soon as Benedict touched him all the blotches on his skin disappeared.

XXVIII During the same period also when a famine was seriously affecting Campania, the man of God had given everything from his own monastery to a number of poor people, and there was hardly anything left in the cellar apart from a little bit of oil in a glass flask. Then a subdeacon called Agapitus arrived, demanding insistently that he should be given a bit of oil. The man of God, who had decided to give away everything on earth so that all things would be laid up for him in heaven,<sup>56</sup> ordered the small amount of oil that was left to be given to the man who was asking for it. But the monk who was in charge of the cellar, although he heard the order, refused to carry it out.

2 A little later when Benedict inquired whether the oil had been given as ordered, the monk replied that he had certainly not given anything because, if he were to give this away, there would be nothing at all left for the brothers. Then Benedict angrily told the others to throw the glass flask, in which there appeared to be a little oil left, out of the window so that nothing should remain in the monastery as a result of disobedience. This was done. Beneath this window there gaped a huge abyss, bristling with huge rocks. When the glass flask was thrown out, it landed on the rocks but it remained unbroken, as if it had not been thrown out at all: it did not break nor did the oil spill. The man of God told them to pick it up and as it was not broken, he gave it to the man who had asked for it. Then he called the brothers together and in front of them all he rebuked the disobedient monk for his lack of faith and for his arrogance.

XXIX His rebuke finished, he devoted himself to prayer together with these brothers. In the place where he was praying with the brothers there stood an empty oil jar with a lid on. As the holy man continued to pray, the lid of the jar was lifted up as the jar filled with oil: the lid moved and was lifted up as the increasing amount of oil spilled over the edge of the jar on to the stone floor of the room where they had knelt to pray. As soon as the servant of God noticed

this he immediately brought his prayer to an end and the oil ceased to flow out over the stone floor.

2 He then admonished the brother at even greater length for his lack of faith and his disobedience, so that he might learn to have faith and humility. This brother blushed at the rebuke which was given for his own good, because by these miracles the venerable father manifested that power of the almighty Lord which he had referred to in his admonition. There was now no way that anyone could doubt His promises, seeing that in one moment He had replaced a nearly empty glass flask with a jar full of oil.

XXX One day while Benedict was on his way to the chapel of St John, which was situated at the very top of the mountain, the old enemy came to meet him disguised as a horse doctor, carrying a funnel made of horn and a shackle. Benedict asked him, 'Where are you going?', to which he replied, 'I am going to the brothers to give them some medicine.' Then the venerable Benedict went on his way to pray and when he had finished he returned in haste. The evil spirit had found an elderly monk drinking water, and entering him at once, threw him to the ground, tormenting him violently. As soon as the man of God returned from his prayer, he saw this man being cruelly tormented. He merely gave him a slap and this immediately drove the evil spirit out of him and it never again dared to return to him.

2 PETER: I should like to know whether he always performed these great miracles by virtue of his prayers or whether he sometimes produced them solely by means of his will?

GREGORY: Those who cling to God with devotion usually produce miracles in two ways, as circumstances demand. Sometimes they perform wonderful things by means of prayer, at other times by means of their own power. Seeing that according to St John, *All those who have received Him, to them He has given the power to become the sons of God*,<sup>57</sup> why is it surprising if those who are sons of God can use their power to perform miracles?

3 Peter witnesses to the fact that miracles may be performed in two ways, for he awakened Tabitha from the dead by praying,<sup>58</sup> but when Ananias and Sapphira lied he gave them over to death simply by rebuking them<sup>59</sup> (for we do not read that he prayed to bring about

their death but merely rebuked them for the wrong they had done). And so it is clear that they sometimes perform these things by their own power, and sometimes by praying, since Peter deprived them of their life by means of rebuke and restored life to Tabitha by means of prayer.

4 I am now going to describe two things done by Benedict, that faithful servant of God, which show clearly that sometimes his ability derived from divinely inspired power, at other times from prayer.<sup>60</sup> XXXI At the time when Totila was king of the Goths, a Goth by the name of Zalla, who was an Arian heretic, burned with an intensely cruel passion against the religious men of the Catholic church. If a cleric or a monk came face to face with him, he would certainly not escape alive from Zalla's hands. One day, inflamed with the fire of his greed, his mouth agape with the desire to steal, he attacked a peasant with his cruel torments and tore him to pieces using a number of different tortures. Overcome by the pain the peasant confessed that he had handed over his things to Benedict, the servant of God, hoping that if the torturer believed this, his cruelty might be suspended for a while and a few hours of life might be gained.

2 So this man Zalla stopped torturing the peasant but tied his arms with strong cords and began to drive him in front of his horse so that the peasant might show him who this Benedict was to whom he had handed over his possessions. The peasant, his arms bound, walked in front as he led Zalla to the holy man's monastery where he found Benedict sitting alone in front of the entrance to his cell, reading. The peasant said to the infuriated Zalla who was right behind him, 'Here he is, the one I was talking about. This is father Benedict.' Zalla, fuming with anger, looked at him in the madness of his deranged mind, and thinking that he would use his usual terror tactics, he began to shout in a loud voice, saying, 'Get up, get up! Give back this peasant's belongings which he handed over to you.'

3 At the sound of his voice the man of God immediately raised his eyes from his reading, looked at him and then noticed the peasant whom he was holding captive. As he turned his eyes to the peasant's arms, the cords miraculously came undone and began to fall from his arms with such speed that they could not have been untied as quickly

by any man, however much he hurried. The man who had arrived tied up suddenly stood there unbound. Zalla, shocked by the strength of such power, fell to the ground at Benedict's feet and, bending his neck, rigid with cruelty, he commended himself to his prayers. The holy man did not even get up from his reading but called the brothers and told them to take Zalla indoors so that he might receive a meal.<sup>61</sup> When Zalla was brought back to him Benedict warned him that he must give up this mad and cruel behaviour. He went away a broken man, and did not dare to demand anything further from the peasant whom the man of God had set free not by touching him but simply by looking at him.

4 This, Peter, is what I said: those who serve the almighty God most faithfully are sometimes able to perform miracles merely by means of their power. For Benedict had managed, while seated, to subdue the fierceness of a terrifying Goth, and to undo with a look the knotted cords binding the arms of an innocent man. The very speed of the miracle reveals to us that he had been allowed to do what he did by his power. Now I must also describe the remarkable kind of miracle he was able to perform by means of prayer.

XXXII One day he went out to work in the fields with the brothers. A peasant, carrying the body of his dead son in his arms and wild with grief at his bereavement, came to the monastery to ask for father Benedict. When he was told that the abbot had gone out for a while in the fields with the brothers, he immediately put the body of his dead son down in front of the monastery door and, distraught with grief, ran as fast as he could to find the venerable abbot.

2 At that moment the man of God was returning with the brothers from his work in the fields. As soon as the bereaved peasant saw him, he began to shout, 'Give me back my son, give me back my son!' Hearing these words the man of God stopped, saying, 'Surely I did not take your son from you?', to which the man replied, 'He is dead. Come and bring him back to life.' As soon as the servant of God heard this, he was very distressed and said, 'Go away, brothers, go away. It is not up to us to deal with this, it is for the holy apostles. Why do you want to impose unbearable burdens on us?' But the man, driven by excessive grief, persisted in his plea, swearing that he



would not go away unless Benedict brought his son back to life. Then the servant of God inquired of him, saying, 'Where is he?', to which the man answered, 'Over there. His body is lying at the door of the monastery.'

3 When the man of God and the brothers reached the place, Benedict knelt down and lay on top of the little child's body;<sup>62</sup> then lifting himself up he raised his hands to heaven, saying, 'Lord, do not look upon my sins but upon the faith of this man who asks that his son be brought back to life. Restore to this little body the soul which you have taken away.' Hardly had he finished the words of his prayer when the soul returned and the whole of the boy's little body shuddered so much that to the eyes of all those present it was clear that he had moved as a result of some miraculous tremor. Then Benedict took the boy's hand and gave him back to his father, alive and well.

4 It is clear, Peter, that he did not perform this miracle by means of his own power for he prayed to be able to perform it as he lay on the ground.

PETER: It is obvious that everything is as you claim because you have facts to prove the theories you put forward. But I ask you to tell me if holy men can do everything they want and if they obtain everything they desire.

XXXIII GREGORY: Will there ever be a more sublime person in this life than Paul? Yet he asked the Lord three times to be freed from the goad of this flesh but was unable to obtain what he desired. In this connection it is necessary for me to tell you about the venerable father Benedict because there was something which he wanted but which he was not able to accomplish.

2 His sister, whose name was Scolastica, had been dedicated to the almighty Lord since her very infancy. She used to come to see Benedict once a year and the man of God would come down to meet her at a property belonging to the monastery not far from the gate.<sup>63</sup> Now one day she came as usual and her venerable brother came down to meet her with his disciples. They spent the whole day praising God and in holy conversation, and when night's darkness fell, they ate a meal together. While they were seated at table, talking of holy matters, it began to get rather late and so this nun, Benedict's sister, made the

following request, 'I beg you not to leave me tonight, so that we might talk until morning about the joys of the heavenly life.' Benedict answered her, 'What are you saying, sister? I certainly cannot stay away from my monastery.'

3 The sky was so clear at the time that there was not a cloud to be seen. When the nun heard the words of her brother's refusal she put her hands together on the table and bent her head in her hands to pray to the almighty Lord. When she lifted her head from the table, such violent lightning and thunder burst forth, together with a great downpour of rain, that neither the venerable Benedict nor the brothers who were with him could set foot outside the door of the place where they were sitting. For the nun, as she bent her head in her hands, had poured forth rivers of tears on to the table, by means of which she had turned the clear sky to rain. That downpour began just as her prayer finished – in fact, the coincidence between the prayer and the downpour was so precise that she lifted her head from the table at the very moment when the thunder sounded and the rain came down at exactly the same moment that she raised her head.

4 Then the man of God realized that he could not return to his monastery in the midst of the thunder and lightning and the heavy downpour of rain. This upset him and he began to complain, saying, 'May the almighty God forgive you, sister. What have you done?' To which she replied, 'Look, I asked you and you refused to listen to me. I asked my Lord and He heard me. Go now, if you can. Leave me behind and return to your monastery.' But being unable to leave the building, he had to remain there against his will since he refused to stay there voluntarily. And so they spent the whole night awake, satisfying each other's hunger for holy conversation about the spiritual life.

5 I said that he wished for something but was totally unsuccessful in achieving it because, if we consider the thoughts of the venerable man, it is clear that he would have wanted the fine weather in which he had gone down from the monastery to continue. But contrary to his wishes, the power of the almighty God caused him to discover a miracle produced by a woman's heart. It is not surprising that a woman was able to achieve more than him at that time, seeing that she had

long desired to see her brother. For according to the words of John, *God is love*,<sup>64</sup> and so it was by a very just judgement that her power was greater because her love was stronger.<sup>65</sup>

PETER: I confess that I very much approve of what you say.

XXXIV GREGORY: The following day, this venerable woman returned to her own cell and the man of God went back to the monastery. After spending three days in his cell, he raised his eyes to heaven and saw the soul of his sister: it had departed from her body and penetrated the mysterious regions of heaven in the form of a dove. Rejoicing in her great glory Benedict gave thanks to the almighty God in hymns of praise and then announced her death to the brothers.

2 At once he sent them to bring her body to his monastery and place it in the tomb which he had prepared for himself. By this means it happened that the bodies of those whose mind had always been united in God were not separated even in the grave.<sup>66</sup>

XXXV On another occasion the deacon Servandus, the abbot of the monastery that had earlier been built in Campania by the patrician Liberius,<sup>67</sup> came on a visit to Benedict, as was his wont. Like Benedict he, too, was a man of deep spiritual understanding and he used to visit Benedict's monastery so that they might pour into one another the sweet words of life. Although they could not yet enjoy it fully, they might at least, by sighing with longing, have a taste of the delicious food of the heavenly homeland.

2 But when the time for sleep demanded, Benedict took his place in the upper part of his tower while the deacon Servandus took his place in the lower part, where a staircase allowed easy communication between the lower and upper parts. In front of the tower there was a large building in which the disciples of both men slept. While the brothers were still asleep, Benedict the man of the Lord was awake, standing at the window. Anticipating the time of the night office he was praying to the almighty Lord when, suddenly, in the dead of night, he saw a light pouring down from above that dispelled all the darkness of the night, shining so brightly that the light casting its rays amid the darkness surpassed the daylight.

3 Then, while he watched, a most remarkable thing happened. As he himself reported later, the whole world was brought before his eyes,

apparently drawn together beneath a single ray of sunlight. While the venerable abbot kept his eyes fixed on the bright blazing light, he saw the soul of Germanus, the bishop of Capua, being carried up to heaven by the angels in a fiery sphere.

4 Wishing to find someone else to witness this great miracle, he called the deacon Servandus, repeating his name two or three times in a loud voice. Disturbed by the unusual shouting of the great man, Servandus went up and had a look but saw only a small bit of light. When the man of God told him exactly what had happened, Servandus was stunned by such a great miracle. At once Benedict ordered the devout Theopropus<sup>68</sup> at the fort at Casinum to send someone that very night to the city of Capua to find out what was happening to bishop Germanus, and to come and tell him. When the messenger did this he found that bishop Germanus, that most reverent man, was already dead, and on making detailed inquiries he learned that his death had occurred at the very moment when the man of the Lord witnessed his ascent.

5 PETER: This is quite amazing – utterly astounding, in fact. But what you said, namely that the whole world was brought before his eyes, apparently drawn together beneath a single ray of sunlight, this is something I have never experienced and which I cannot even imagine. How can it possibly happen that the whole world is seen by one man?

6 GREGORY: Hold on tight to what I am saying, Peter: the whole of creation is small to the soul that sees the Creator. Although it has seen only a tiny part of the Creator's light, all that has been created becomes small to him because in the light of the vision the folds of the innermost mind are relaxed and it expands in God to such an extent that it becomes larger than the world. The soul of the one who sees rises up above itself. In the light of God it is drawn up above itself and its innermost parts expand. As it looks down below itself from above, it understands how small everything is which it was unable to grasp from down below. The man who saw the fiery globe and the angels returning to heaven could not possibly have seen this except in the light of God. Is it surprising, then, if he saw the world drawn together before him after he had been lifted up outside the world in the light of the mind?

7 The fact that the world is said to be drawn together before his eyes does not mean that heaven and earth had contracted but that the mind of the observer had expanded. Caught up into God he could easily see everything that is beneath God. To that outer light, then, shining before his eyes, there corresponded an inner light in his mind which swept the soul of the observer up to the higher regions and showed it how insignificant everything below was.

8 PETER: I think it was a good thing that I did not understand what you said, seeing that your explanation developed as a result of my obtuseness. But now that you have made these things clear to my understanding, I ask you to return to the order of the narrative.

XXXVI GREGORY: Peter, I would like to tell you many more things about this venerable abbot but I must pass over some things on purpose because I am keen to give an account of other people's deeds. However, I do not wish you to be unaware that amidst all the miracles which made him famous throughout the world the man of God was no less outstanding for the wisdom of his teaching. For he wrote a Rule for the brothers which is remarkable for its discretion and the clarity of its language. If anyone should wish to know about his character or his way of life in greater detail, he can discover in the teaching of that Rule a complete account of Benedict's practice: for the holy man was incapable of teaching anything that was contrary to the way he lived.

XXXVII In the same year that he was going to depart from this life, he announced the day of his most holy death to some of the disciples who were living with him and to some who lived far away. To those who were with him he said that they should remain silent about what they had heard, while to those who were far away he indicated what kind of sign they would receive when his soul departed from his body.

2 Six days before his death he ordered that his tomb should be opened for him. Then he was gripped by a fever: he had a high temperature and began to grow weak. The illness grew worse every day, and on the sixth day he made his disciples carry him into the chapel and there he armed himself for death by partaking of the Lord's body and blood. While his disciples' hands supported his weakened body, he stood

with his hands raised to heaven and breathed his last in the middle of a prayer.

3 On that day one and the same vision appeared to two of his brothers, to one in his monastery and to another who lived at some distance. They both saw a road spread with cloaks and shining with innumerable lights, stretching eastwards from Benedict's monastery to heaven. Above it stood a man of majestic appearance, shining brightly, who asked them whose road it was they were looking at. They admitted that they did not know and so he said to them, 'This is the road along which Benedict, beloved by the Lord, is going up to heaven.' Then just as those who were with Benedict witnessed the holy man's death, so those who were far away learnt of it by means of this sign.

4 He was buried in the chapel of St John the Baptist that he had himself built on the site of the altar of Apollo he had destroyed.

XXXVIII In the cave of Subiaco where he had lived earlier, to this day dazzling miracles still occur if the faith of those who ask demands it. Recently something happened which I shall tell you about: a madwoman had lost her senses completely and was wandering night and day over mountains and through valleys, forests and fields. She would only rest where exhaustion forced her to do so. One day when she was wandering without stopping, she came to the cave of that blessed man, father Benedict: she entered it and stayed there without realizing where she was. When morning came she departed, her mind restored to such perfect health that it was as if no madness had ever gripped her. For the rest of her life she continued in the same state of health which she had recovered there.

2 PETER: How is it that we often find the same thing happening in the case of the patronage of martyrs? They do not offer as much assistance through their bodily remains as through their relics and they perform greater miracles in those places where they are not actually buried?

3 GREGORY: It is certain, Peter, that the holy martyrs can perform many marvels in those places where they are buried, as indeed they do, and reveal innumerable miracles to those who seek with a pure mind. But because it is possible that weak minds might doubt whether the holy martyrs are present and listening in those places where they



are obviously not physically present, it is necessary for them to perform more impressive miracles in those places where a weak mind might doubt their presence. But those whose mind is fixed in God gain greater merit for their faith, for they know that the martyrs are listening even though their bodies are not buried there.

4 To increase the disciples' faith the Truth itself also said, *If I do not depart, the Comforter will not come to you.*<sup>69</sup> For since it is certain that the Comforter, the Spirit, always proceeds from the Father and from the Son, why does the Son say that He will depart so that He who never leaves the Son may come? But because the disciples, seeing the Lord in the flesh, thirsted to see Him always with their bodily eyes, it was right that they should be told, *If I do not depart, the Comforter will not come*, as if to say, 'If I do not withdraw physically, I will not show you what is the love of the spirit and unless you cease to see me physically, you will never learn to love me spiritually.'

5 PETER: What you say is quite right.

GREGORY: We must now stop talking for a while. If we wish to go on to recount the miracles of others, a period of silence will give us time to recover our powers of speech.

*Life of Antony by Athanasius*

INTRODUCTION

1. There has been much debate over whether Athanasius really did write this work. See K. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Tübingen 1936), chapter 3. It was certainly attributed to Athanasius by Gregory in his *Oration on Athanasius* (20.5), probably composed in 380, and by Jerome in his work *On Famous Men*, written in 392.
2. R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, *Early Arianism – a View of Salvation* (London 1981), p. 133.
3. D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford 1995), p. 264.
4. See the remarks of R. C. Gregg in the introduction to his translation of Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (New York 1980), pp. 11–13.
5. J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. C. Misrahi (2nd edition, New York 1974), p. 125.
6. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 20.5; Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 8; John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew*, 8; Jerome, *On Famous Men*, 88; Rufinus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.8; Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.6.15.
7. Eusebius had been sent into exile in 355 for his refusal to condemn Athanasius at the Synod of Milan.
8. See *Life of Martin*, VI.4.
9. It is possible that it was Evagrius who suggested that Jerome, after his unhappy time in the Syrian desert, might go to Rome and work as Pope Damasus' secretary. Since it was Damasus who in 382 asked Jerome to revise the Latin text of the Bible, it may be that we are ultimately indebted to Evagrius for the Vulgate.
10. Jerome, *Letter* 1.15, the earliest of Jerome's surviving compositions.
11. Cf. Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, 2.
12. Jerome, *Letter* 7.1.
13. This is not to be confused with the Melitian schism, referred to by Athanasius in the *Life of Antony*, which occurred earlier in the fourth century and centred on Egypt.

2. Paulinus of Nola, the friend of Sulpicius Severus, is included among these saints: although he came from Gaul he spent most of his life in Italy at the shrine of St Felix of Nola in Campania.
3. Gregory wrote the *Moralia*, which uses the text of the book of Job as a starting point for spiritual and theological discussions, homilies on Ezechiel and the Gospel, as well as the *Pastoral Rule*.
4. The earliest example of this apologetic use of the genre is probably the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, dating from the early third century.

## LIFE OF BENEDICT

1. In the Latin there is a pun here on the name Benedict which means blessed.
2. Nursia, now Norcia, lies some 100 kilometres north-east of Rome. Benedict was born there in about 480.
3. i.e. at Subiaco.
4. Cf. Matthew 5:15.
5. Numbers 8:24–5.
6. This was the monastery of Vicovaro.
7. Luke 15:11–17.
8. Acts of the Apostles 12:11.
9. St Paul.
10. Philippians 1:21, 1:23.
11. Acts of the Apostles 9:24–5; 2 Corinthians 11:32–3.
12. Gregory interprets this episode in a similar way in his *Moralia in Job* 31:58.
13. It is from this disciple of Benedict that the Maurists, the members of the French Benedictine congregation founded in 1621 and known for its scholarship, took their name.
14. Cf. *Life of Antony*, 6.
15. humble; Cf. Matthew 5:3.
16. Cf. Matthew 11:30.
17. Exodus 17:1–7; Numbers 20:2–13.
18. 2 Kings 6:4–7.
19. Matthew 14:28–9.
20. 1 Kings 17:6.
21. 2 Samuel 1:11–12, 18:33.
22. John 1:9.
23. John 1:16.
24. Matthew 12:39–40.
25. At Monte Cassino.

26. Cf. Paulus Diaconus, *History of the Lombards*, 1.26. In Benedict's day St Martin was widely venerated in Italy.
27. The devil calls Benedict 'Maledictus' (cursed), playing on the meaning of his name (blessed).
28. Prologue, 2.
29. Cf. 2 Kings 5:25–6 where Elisha reveals that he knows of Gehazi's conversation with Naaman.
30. The meeting between Totila and Benedict seems to have taken place in 546.
31. Totila died in 552.
32. In south-east Italy. The bishop's name was Sabinus.
33. In 546.
34. Cf. Prologue, 2.
35. Aquinum lay about ten kilometres west of Monte Cassino.
36. Until the man died.
37. 1 Corinthians 6:17.
38. St Paul at Romans 11:34.
39. 1 Corinthians 2:11.
40. 1 Corinthians 2:12.
41. 1 Corinthians 2:9–10.
42. Romans 11:33; Peter quotes Romans 11:34 in section XVI.4.
43. Psalm 119:13.
44. The destruction by the Lombards probably occurred in 577. The monks fled and the buildings remained ruinous for the next 140 years.
45. Acts of the Apostles 27:22–4.
46. Probably in 537–8.
47. John 3:8.
48. 2 Samuel 7:1–17.
49. 2 Kings 4:27.
50. Terracino lay some fifty kilometres south-west of Monte Cassino.
51. Habakkuk.
52. *Bel and the Dragon* (chapter 14 of the Greek version of Daniel), 33–9.
53. Matthew 16:19.
54. In the Incarnation.
55. According to the *Rule of Benedict* (67.7) monks were not allowed to leave the monastery without their abbot's permission.
56. Cf. Matthew 6:19–20.
57. John 1:12.
58. Acts of the Apostles 9:40.
59. Acts of the Apostles 5:1–10.

60. Cf. *Life of Antony*, 84, on the performing of miracles.
61. The word '*benedictio*', usually meaning a blessing, here bears one of its rarer meanings, being used of a free meal which is blessed and given to visitors.
62. Cf. Elisha and the Shunammite's son: 2 Kings 4:34-5.
63. This was because women, even close relatives, were not allowed to enter the monastery.
64. 1 John 4:16.
65. Cf. Luke 7:47.
66. This recalls the account of Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:23: *in their death they were not divided*.
67. Liberius' illustrious career spanned the years 484-554 approximately. He is mentioned by, amongst others, Cassiodorus, Ennodius and Procopius.
68. Cf. *Life of Benedict*, 17.1.
69. John 16:7.