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Chapter 15

The Latin West III: Benedictine Monasticism and Mysticism

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This essay will suggest the main elements of western monastic mysticism as found in its classic texts. Among them is the *Rule of Benedict* (*RB*), whose few but precious references to spiritual experience place it firmly within a literary tradition based on translated eastern monastic writings, the Latin monastic synthesis of John Cassian, and the burgeoning *regulae* of western monasticism. Indeed, it is misleading to speak of "Benedictine" mysticism, as if Benedict had a distinctive approach to the spiritual life. In the *RB* we see an eminently mainstream presentation of ascetic theology and catch glimpses of an understanding of prayer that emphasizes themes drawn from other monastic texts. Those texts were read within a theological environment shaped most of all by the Bible and its major Latin interpreters. In this survey I therefore begin with that biblical grounding of monastic religious experience, and the corollary importance of the study of Latin as the key to the sacred text and its interpreters. Then I will review the monastic literature available in the west at the time of Benedict, with particular attention to the influence of John Cassian (ca. 365-ca. 435), whose writings provided an early conduit to the west for the monastic teaching of the east. Benedict's inclusion of Augustine's writings among his authoritative sources points to what would become the classic western monastic synthesis of Augustine's Platonically-infused mysticism and the biblically-centered prayer of the eastern monastic tradition with its emphasis on compunction. The result was to be classically expressed in the writings of Gregory the Great (540-604), which would become staple monastic texts in the centuries after Benedict. As the *RB* slowly became influential and then assumed a privileged

role in the monastic reforms of the Frankish empire from the mid-eighth century onwards, the "Benedictine" monasticism that emerged from this process rested upon a deep foundation that had been built during more than 350 years of western monastic experimentation.

The focus on the development of the western monastic understanding of prayer, its traces in *RB*, and expression in the writings of Gregory the Great limits the scope of this survey. The monasticism of Martin of Tours in Gaul (316-97), or of Paulinus of Nola (354-431) and his wife Theresia at Nola in Italy are important for the history of western monasticism, but they did not affect the development of western monastic spirituality. Celtic monasticism played a role in the spread of *RB* within the Continental mission of Columbanus (ca. 540-615), but its insular, indigenous form with a distinctive organization of communal life and rich poetic tradition is its own, separate, story. Anglo-Saxon monasticism and its great polymath, Bede the Venerable (672/3-735), drew from the same theological and monastic sources as Benedict and Gregory and laid the groundwork for the flourishing English Benedictine monasticism of later centuries, but here the focus will be on the tradition that nurtured Bede. The Iberian monasticism most famously associated with the bishops Isidore of Seville (d. 636) and Fructusosus of Braga (d. 665) also had its own distinctive character. Isidore would become a popular author in monasteries for his skillful digests of earlier writings but did not himself have a significant influence on the development of western monastic spirituality.

The Psalms, Exegesis, Allegory, and Prayer

The environment for monastic mysticism was immersion in the Latin Bible, and especially the Psalms (Dyer 1999; Stewart 2008). Monks spent hours together each day chanting psalms and listening to biblical readings, as well as several hours of private *lectio divina*

("sacred reading"), focused particularly on the Bible. It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the Psalms for western monasticism. The *RB*'s comparatively moderate liturgical observance required the monks to spend approximately 3-4 hours daily singing through the forty or so psalms spread across each day's eight "offices" of common prayer. Benedict required his monks to use each psalm at least once in the course of a week, and several psalms occurred daily as fixed elements of the major offices. Among them were Psalms 3 and 94(95), which opened the nocturnal vigil office, and Psalms 66(67), 50(51), and 148-50, which began and concluded the psalmody of the dawn office of Lauds (the very name for the office comes from the repeated use in those final psalms of the Latin verb *laudare* ("to praise"). These most familiar texts emphasize again and again the basic themes of monastic prayer: the urgent need for God's help, the imperative of compunction for sin, and praise for God's wondrous deeds. The briefer daytime offices of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None consisted primarily of sections of the longest psalm, Psalm 118(119). This extended meditation on the goodness of the divine law repeats synonyms for *lex* ("law") in each of its 176 verses, cycling through repeated invocations of God's *testimonia*, *viae*, *mandata*, *iustificationes*, *iudicia*, *sermones*, *eloquia*, *verba* in a remarkable tour de force that modeled and reinforced monastic meditation on scripture outside the framework of the divine office.

Monastic singers and hearers of the Psalms followed Christian convention in understanding royal psalms as prophecies about Christ, references to Jerusalem as allegories of the Church, and so on. Psalms voiced in the first-person singular, traditionally believed to have been the personal prayers of King David, lent themselves most readily to subjective appropriation for prayer. In an era of few books, the Psalms had to be learned by heart for liturgical performance. They were known not so much by their canonical number as by their opening words. Thus, the psalms listed above were known as *Cum invocarem exaudivit me* and

Venite exultemus Domino; *Deus misereatur nostri*, *Miserere mei Deus*, and *Laudate dominum de caelis*; and *Beati immaculati in via*. These were the cadences in which monks learned to pray. In Benedict's time there were several modes of performance of psalmody, some of which involved simply listening to a soloist, others more participative with the use of a refrain. The now familiar practice of alternating strophes between two groups ("choirs") of monks became the norm somewhat later (Dyer 1989). The experience of monastic liturgy, then, involved the mutually reinforcing experiences of verbalizing and listening, further ingraining these privileged texts in the memory. Understandably, such intimate knowledge of the psalms deeply influenced the rhetoric of private prayer. Seven of the eight offices, as well as rituals performed in the monastic refectory, began by invoking a verse from Psalm 69(70), "God, come to my assistance/Lord, make haste to help me," that had been recommended by Cassian as a formula for continual meditation.

Monastic common prayer was always in Latin, and given the pervasiveness of biblical formulae, private prayer too would have been largely conceived and expressed in Latin. Latin was not just a learned language but was thought to be a sacred one as well, a belief based on the tradition that the Cross bore an inscription of Jesus' name in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (John 19:20). This elevation of Latin to a place alongside the two biblical languages added a sacral dimension to its already central role in western culture. By the time of Benedict, Latin was no longer a vernacular language. The Psalms were often a monastic newcomer's first substantial encounter with the Latin language, and they were used as a primer for learning Latin grammar. Even for those born in regions where Romance languages predominated, and for whom the difference between their spoken tongue and the Latin of the Bible, the liturgy, and religious literature was not as great as it was for those from Celtic or Germanic regions, the gap was ever-widening as the Romance dialects continued to evolve into distinct

languages (Ruff 2012). The insistence on purity of Latin characteristic of the Carolingian reforms in the eighth and ninth centuries (which encompassed both Romance and Germanic regions) suggests that linguistic differentiation had reached a critical stage (Grotans 2006: 16-18). Among those for whom Latin was entirely alien, such as the Irish, Anglo-Saxons, and the Franks (Charlemagne's native language was a Germanic dialect), instruction in Latin had to be thorough. Scholars have noted that one could count on good grammar and spelling in manuscripts from those regions, whereas in Gaul the language had a greater tendency to show vernacular traits (Zelzer 1987; Grotans 2006:111-154).

The fact that Latin was regarded as a sacred, and not simply a literary, language explains the fascination with etymology characteristic of Latin Christian culture. Biblical narrative was thought to be replete with allegorical mysteries, and so were its component words. This was especially true of proper names, whether personal or geographical. This mystical understanding of language itself was by no means confined to Latin Christianity, as any study of medieval Jewish mysticism will readily demonstrate [SEE SOLTES]. Both traditions were approaching God through a language that had passed out of vernacular usage (even if in the Latin world it was still used for administrative and commercial purposes). The Latin Bible offered not just "text" but potent symbols, deeply evocative and determinative of the ways in which medieval monastic men and women perceived and interpreted the universe around them.

Monastic Tradition and its Reception in the Early Middle Ages

Given that the deepest theological and spiritual formation came from the Bible, monks and nuns relied heavily on the patristic commentaries and homilies on the Bible read daily at the office of Vigils, in the refectory, and in their personal *lectio divina*. These writings opened up the hidden, "mystical" meanings of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament. Such

interpretative texts were complemented by etymological reference works on biblical names and places by Jerome and, later, Isidore. In the ninth century Hildemar of Corbie (d. 850), the great commentator on *RB*, insisted that monks should follow Benedict's recommendation and complement their biblical reading with commentaries (cf. *RB* 73.4), even if they could not find one on the same book. Hildemar further specified that the unimpeachable (*nominatissimi*) authorities for understanding the Bible were Augustine, Gregory, Ambrose, and Jerome (*Expos.*, 9). Apart from Gregory, all of these authors were known to Benedict and his monks.

The spirituality and mysticism of early medieval Latin monasticism is not found in mystical or esoteric treatises but is instead to be gleaned from the writings of those key expositors of biblically-centered spirituality and from the monastic religious culture described in specifically monastic literature. The monastic writings known to Benedict were largely prescriptive and exemplary, full of recommended practices and stories about heroic saints. Most of the foundational texts of classic Egyptian monasticism became available in Latin translation during the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, supplemented by Latin compositions such as Jerome's lives of famous monks and his letters, Sulpitius Severus' *Life of Martin* and his *Dialogues*, and the first Latin monastic rules. As we will see, Cassian's early fifth-century interpretation and adaptation of the Egyptian tradition had a decisive impact on Latin monastic self-understanding at a formative stage.

Apart from Cassian's writings on prayer, however, there was little theoretical discussion of prayer or mysticism in any of these Latin monastic writings or translations. The major eastern Christian mystical writings seem to have been unknown in the west. For example, although many of the works of Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345-99) were translated in the fourth and fifth centuries, there is no indication that either his treatise *On Prayer* or his

Kephalaia Gnostika were among them (Stewart 2012). Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* with its profound mystical instruction was not known in the west until George of Trebizond's translation almost a thousand years later. Although the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus was translated twice in the ninth century [SEE OTTEN], its impact on western monastic spirituality would come only in the twelfth century. To understand the *RB*, and the tradition it represents, the principal figures are Cassian, who brought Egyptian monastic teaching on prayer to the west, and Gregory, whose monastic hermeneutic of Scripture was deeply informed by Augustine's mysticism.

John Cassian on Prayer

John Cassian (ca. 365-ca. 435) wrote at a critical point in the historical development of Latin monasticism (Stewart 1998; Goodrich 2007). In the course of his long life he had journeyed through the major centers of monastic life, both east and west. Probably born in Scythia Minor, a bilingual (Greek and Latin) region on the western coast of the Black Sea (in present-day Romania), he traveled as a young man with his closest friend, Germanus, to Palestine, where they entered a Greek-language monastic community in Bethlehem. After a brief period they went to Egypt and spent more than a decade in the semi-anchoritic desert settlement of Scetis. Driven out of Egypt around the year 400 by an international controversy over Origen's interpretation of Scripture, Cassian and Germanus went to Constantinople and worked for John Chrysostom until Chrysostom was himself engulfed in controversy and driven from office in 405. The two then went then to Rome to plead on Chrysostom's behalf, but then their trail goes cold. Only in the mid-410s does Cassian re-emerge in southern Gaul, now on his own. Based in the port city of Massilia (modern Marseilles), he became a consultant to bishops wanting to establish or to reform

monasteries, and according to tradition, was the founder of two monasteries in Marseilles itself.

Cassian idealized his experience in Egypt and tailored the practices and spirituality of Egyptian monasticism to the circumstances of southern Gaul. The result was immensely influential. Together his *Institutes* and *Conferences* constitute the largest compendium of monastic instruction compiled by a single Latin author. The *Institutes* are principally ascetical, with instructions about monastic practices and a presentation of Evagrius' system of eight generic thoughts as the agenda for attaining ascetic maturity. The *Conferences* are more spiritual, with important discussions of prayer, biblical interpretation, and chastity. Cassian proved to be the principal conduit to the west for the teaching on prayer of both Origen and Evagrius (Marsili 1936; Stewart 2003), adding to their intellectual emphasis his own understanding of a kind of ecstatic prayer more reminiscent of other strands of Christian spirituality such as the Pseudo-Macarian *Homilies*. Cassian's principal contributions to Latin monastic mysticism were his linking of liturgical psalmody to personal prayer in the practice of "unceasing" prayer, his transmission to the west of Evagrius' teaching about prayer free of mental depictions, even of Christ ("imageless" prayer), and the references throughout his writings to an ecstatic experience of prayer he often described as "fiery" or as an *excessus mentis*, a "going out from the mind."

Cassian's two-part treatise on unceasing prayer (*Conferences* 9-10) fulfills a promise made in the *Institutes*. There his main topic had been the liturgical offices ("canonical prayers") incumbent upon all monks, whether solitaries or cenobites (*Inst.* 2-3). As would later be the case in the Benedictine Divine Office, those services consisted largely of chanted psalms, with each psalm followed by a period of silent prayer. Cassian consistently distinguishes "psalmody" (*psalmodia*) from the "prayer" (*oratio*) that followed it. This pattern

is familiar from many Egyptian monastic sources, where it is clear that chanting a psalm was not itself understood to constitute "prayer," but was preparation for a subsequent moment in which a sentiment expressed by the Psalmist (gratitude, praise, lament, etc.) would inspire personal prayer. As noted earlier, the Psalms lend themselves particularly to nourishment for personal prayer because of their wide emotional range and intense intimacy. In *Conference* 10, Cassian describes a technique to focus the mind that he had learned from the monks in Egypt. It consisted simply of the continual repetition of a psalm verse, "God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps 69[70]:2). In Cassian's view, repeating this verse elided the functions of *psalmodia* and *oratio*, since the phrase is both biblical and deeply personal (*Conf.* 10.10-13). Cassian suggests that constant praying of this formula will also help one to internalize the other Psalms so that they too can become an almost intuitive articulation of one's own feelings and existential situation (*Conf.* 10.11.4-5). In emphasizing this personal and subjective aspect of psalmody, Cassian was likely inspired by an influential treatise of Athanasius, the *Letter to Marcellinus*, a text not translated into Latin until the 15th century (Stewart 2011).

Cassian's themes of ecstatic prayer and the necessity of praying without mental representations of God (specifically, of Christ) appear at first to be unlikely companions, located as they are in different parts of the spectrum of religious experience. For Cassian, however, they are essential components of the teaching on prayer outlined in *Conferences* 9-10. For the most part, *Conference* 9 is a conventional catechesis that echoes the structure and principal themes of Origen's *On Prayer*, which Cassian surely knew: the need for suitable preparation before beginning to pray, the various kinds of prayer (based on the four kinds of prayer mentioned in 1 Tim. 2:1), the meaning of the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father"), and the

efficacy of prayer of petition. To these Cassian adds his own teaching on "fiery" prayer and an extraordinary analysis of spiritual phenomena.

In the *Institutes,* Cassian had already remarked on the possibility of an ecstatic experience occurring during the liturgical offices, prompted by the beauty of a chanter's voice (*Inst.* 2.10.1; cf. *Conf.* 9. 26.1), but he waited until the *Conferences*, with their emphasis on the interior life, to describe this experience more fully (Stewart 1998:116-22). At the end of his review of the four kinds of biblical prayer, Cassian observes that these distinct forms of prayer can suddenly and unexpectedly be gathered up in an exhilarating rush of prayer that transcends speech, thought, and imagination:

> Sometimes the mind, having advanced to and become rooted in true perfection of purity,
> conceives all of these simultaneously,
> and passing through them together like an incomprehensible and voracious flame,
> pours out ineffable prayers to God with the greatest force,
> which the Spirit himself offers to God,
> breaking in with unutterable sighs unknown to us,
> conceiving in that very moment and pouring forth ineffably in supplication such things
> that I say not only could not be spoken by the mouth, but could not even be recalled by the mind afterward (*Conf.* 9.15.2).

Near the end of *Conference* 9, Cassian includes a tantalizing analysis of various forms of intense spiritual experience under the generic heading of "compunction," a term that will later become central to Gregory the Great's spiritual teaching (*conpunctio*; Stewart 1998:122-129). These experiences range from irrepressible shouts of exultation so loud they can be

heard in the neighboring cell to the profound introspection of a mind hidden in deepest silence, overwhelmed and astonished by spiritual illumination, able to pour forth its feelings only in unutterable sighs. In between is the more usual compunction of a sorrow expressible only in tears (*Conf.* 9.27). Then Cassian provides the first analysis in Christian literature of the phenomenon of tears in the spiritual life, considering their multivalent signification of both joy and sorrow, their causes, and the inadvisability of forcing them from dry eyes (*Conf.* 9:27-30). This section concludes with an otherwise unknown—and likely apocryphal—saying attributed to Antony the Great, "It is not a perfect prayer if the monk is aware of himself or of what he is praying," underscoring the theme of *excessus mentis* (*Conf.* 9.31).

With *Conference 10*, Cassian abruptly shifts to his other major theme, imageless prayer. The conference opens with the story of a venerable and exemplary Egyptian monk, Abba Serapion, who learns that his accustomed manner of praying to a mental representation of Christ is both theologically incorrect and spiritually dangerous. Trapped by long habit, unable to change his mode of prayer, the monk collapses in despair (*Conf.* 10.2-5). That this lesson was taught by a visiting deacon from Cappadocia, homeland of the three great theologians from whom Evagrius himself had learned his theology, is Cassian's way of emphasizing the necessity of a correct theology of prayer: from where else would such enlightenment have come? The deacon is even named Photinus, "enlightened one." Cassian's interlocutur in the conference, Abba Isaac of Scetis, explains that the old monk's failure had been to limit his prayer to a representation of Christ's humanity. He had failed to recognize that meditation upon the human nature of Christ was to be a means to reach the limitless simplicity of his divine nature, and was not the destination itself. The Platonic thrust of this movement from the material to the spiritual is underscored by Cassian's analogy to Jesus' withdrawal from the "crowds below" so as to ascend the "mountain of the desert"

where he showed the "brightness" of his divinity to his chosen disciples (*Conf.* 10.6). It is at this point that Cassian introduces his "formula" for unceasing prayer, "God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me" (*Conf.* 10.10). With his teaching now complete, Cassian returns to ecstatic prayer, joining his two themes in a single summary description of the highest form of prayer:

> Our mind arrives at that incorruption of prayer…
> That is not concerned with considering any image,
> and indeed is not distinguished by any accompaniment of voice or words,
> but with the intention of the mind on fire
> [this prayer] is produced through an inexpressible ecstasy of heart, by an insatiable
> keenness of spirit,
> and so the mind altered beyond sense or visible matter
> pours forth [prayer] to God with unutterable groans and sighs (*Conf.* 10.11.6).

For Cassian, both fiery prayer and imageless prayer are ascents from multiplicity, words, and images to a realm of spiritual experience marked by a profound apophaticism. This apophaticism does not exclude feeling, but it is feeling expressed as energy and exuberance. Cassian's ease in working in both registers of spiritual experience—the apophatic and the kataphatic—would become the norm in both east and west. His near contemporary, the Greek author Diadochus of Photikē (fl. ca. 450), also juxtaposed explicitly Evagrian cautions against images in prayer with distinctively Ps-Macarian phrases used to underscore the intensity of spiritual experience. We shall see a similar finesse in Gregory the Great.

Benedict of Nursia and Benedictine Monasticism

Against this backdrop of early medieval western monastic culture we can now turn to Benedict of Nursia, his *Rule*, and its spiritual teaching. Recent decades have seen a substantial

revision to the traditional view of the origins and development of western European monasticism, emphasizing its complexity and interrelatedness. A better understanding of Benedict's monastic legislation has shown it to be heavily dependent on earlier monastic literature, particularly on the *Rule of the Master*, another Italian rule composed shortly before the *RB*, which was previously thought to be a later derivative of the *RB* itself. Rather than viewing Benedict as a brilliant innovator, modern assessments now consider him to have been a perceptive and sensitive adapter of the rich but rambling and idiosyncratic *Rule of the Master*, judiciously editing its useful elements and replacing its unrealistic model of monastic obedience with more reasonable expectations. To the material adapted from the Master, Benedict added his own reading of the monastic sources, principally Cassian on prayer and Augustine on fraternal relations. The *RB* is thus like its predecessors, an adaptation or synthesis of a received monastic tradition. In the west since around the year 400 such adaptations were typically expressed in the form of a thematically arranged code of life, a *regula*. Although Benedict's own monastery of Monte Cassino was destroyed in 568 and was not resettled until 717, the *RB* itself survived, and over time, it became recognized for its evident practical wisdom and spiritual depth, proving to be an effective tool for monastic reform. As a result, the *RB*, a fruit of the broader western monastic tradition, eventually came to epitomize it.

The *RB* contains more spiritual teaching than one might expect in a monastic rule, though with an emphasis more on asceticism than on mysticism. Most of the chapters on prayer in *RB* are devoted to arrangements for the communal prayer of the Divine Office (*RB* 8-18). An additional chapter describes the attitude appropriate for the singing of psalms (*RB* 19), followed by a chapter "on reverence in prayer" (*RB* 20). The pairing of these two was inherited from the *Rule of the Master* (although the content has been substantially shortened

and rewritten), following Cassian's approach in distinguishing *psalmodia* from *oratio*. At this period each psalm of the communal liturgy was still followed by a period for silent prayer, as was the custom in Egypt. Thus Benedict concludes Chapter 20 with the note that "in community, prayer [i.e., after each psalm] should always be kept brief, and when the superior gives the signal, all should rise together" (*RB* 20.5).

Both chapters are concise. That on psalmody reminds its readers that when they sing the psalmody of the offices they are standing in the presence of God and the angels, and should comport themselves accordingly. Benedict's accent on reverence and compunction in psalmody and (as we shall see) in his teaching on prayer points to a strong consciousness of human sinfulness before a God who is both judge and savior. This awareness reached deep into the monastic imagination, pervading not only the monastic literature of the Middle Ages but also the prayers of the Mass as well. The strongly hierarchical structure of medieval society was amplified by the presence of an invisible spiritual hierarchy that led via ranks of angels to God himself, whether viewed as the glorified Christ the true King (*RB* Prol. 3; 61.10) or less specifically as the Lord God of the Universe as in *RB* 20. Not untypically for his time, Benedict elides the titles "Christ," "Lord," and "God," reminding the reader that there is often a Christological reference implicit even in seemingly generic references to "God."

The *Rule*'s most famous chapter, on the Ladder of Humility (*RB* 7), opens with a vivid evocation of God's omnipresence and omniscience, with the corollary imperative that monks acknowledge and internalize that existential reality as the "fear of God" (*timor Dei*), the classic biblical description of *pietas*. The chapter on psalmody echoes the theme: "we believe the divine presence to be everywhere, and that 'the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the bad in every place' (Prov. 15:3), and we believe this even more, without the

least doubt, when we are present at the Divine Office" (*RB* 19.1-2). The gravity of this acknowledgment lay in the belief that eternal punishment is a very real possibility, even for someone who has a profound faith in God's mercy and a hope for eternal life. This movement from fear of Hell to love for God as the prime motivator for a virtuous life was a commonplace in monastic literature, here expressed in Benedict's depiction of the perfectly humble monk who has climbed the 12 steps of humility to arrive finally at "the perfect love that casts out fear" (cf. 1 John 4.18). Then, "all of those things which previously he could not observe without dread, he now does without effort, as if naturally, from habit, no longer in fear of Hell, but with love for Christ, out of that same good habit and delight in virtue" (*RB* 7.67-69). Progress from fear to love by the practice of humility—like Benedict's teaching on compunction and tears—is traceable to Cassian, whose brief list of ten marks of humility indicating such progress (*Inst.* 4.39) was transformed by the Master into the ladder of twelve steps. Cassian's influence on *RB* comes both via the *RM* and directly through Benedict's own reading of Cassian's teaching on prayer.

Chapter 20 on prayer is as concise as that on psalmody (both are shorter than the Master's equivalent chapters). Its characterization of prayer as imbued with compunction and tears links it to the other references to prayer in the *RB*:

> devote yourself frequently to prayer, each day confess your past sins to God in prayer *with tears and sighing*, and correct these faults in the future (*RB* 4.57, emphases added)
>
> we know that we will be heard not because of many words, but in *purity of heart and compunction of tears* (*RB* 20.3, emphases added)

> [Lenten penance] will be done well if we refrain from all vices, and [instead] give ourselves over to *prayer with tears, reading, compunction of heart*, and the work of abstinence(*RB* 49.4, emphases added)
>
> If one wishes to pray privately [in the oratory], let him simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with *tears and intention of heart* (*RB* 52.4, emphases added)

Of these four key texts of the *RB* on prayer, only the first is derived from the *Rule of the Master* (*RB* 4.57 = *RM* 3.63). That the Master never otherwise links prayer and tears (except with reference to grief over a wayward monk), nor uses the word *conpunctio*, suggests that here we encounter Benedict's own understanding of personal prayer. Indeed, Benedict seems more interested in the qualities of prayer than is the Master, and his deployment of Cassianic terminology such as *puritas cordis* and *intentio cordis* shows him looking to Cassian for help in expressing important but elusive concepts. As we will see, Gregory the Great's appropriation of these aspects of Cassian's thought will draw the thread of compunction right through the Latin monastic tradition.

The *RB* otherwise tells us nothing about personal prayer. Nor does it suggest that a monk should be given over to "contemplation." Instead it emphasizes reading, the *lectio divina* so closely associated with Benedictine monasticism. As suggested earlier, reading and praying over the Bible was understood to bring monks into deeper understanding of the Spirit-laden text. The emphasis in western monasticism on Latin grammar and the study of authoritative commentators on the Bible further underscores the central place in monastic spiritual practice of investigation into hidden, "mystical" meanings of biblical texts. We have already seen the link between liturgical psalmody and prayer with tears in the *RB*; there are similar close associations between *lectio* and *oratio* (*RB* 4.55-56 and 49.4).

Monastic reading at this time was an immersive experience involving the body and memory much more intensively than is the case in modern practice. Phrases were spoken aloud (thus any reading during siesta time was to be done quietly, *RB* 48.5), repeated, and memorized. Benedict's descriptions of reading sometimes use the verb *meditari* or its noun, *meditatio*, common in monastic literature to denote the slow, close reading of texts for the sake both of memorizing them and pondering their meaning (*RB* 8.3, 48.23, 58.5). In an era of handwritten texts typically presented with little or no space between the words on the page, such careful reading and verbalization were also necessary preparation for public reading. The use of eye, mouth, and ear to decipher and remember what was being read meant that private reading was similar to the communal experience of hearing someone chant or declaim a text. The daily schedule of the monastery provided 2-3 hours for *lectio*, a provision described with deceptive simplicity as "let them be free (*vacent*) for reading" (*RB* 48.4, 10, 14, 17, 22). The verb *vacare* appears in one of the earliest Latin monastic rules, from the island monastery of Lérins in southern Gaul, where the first three hours of each day are "left free for God" (*Rule of the Four Fathers*, ca. 410). Over the next century the practices did not change, but the monastic vocabulary used to describe it became more precise. Subsequent versions of the *Rule of the Four Fathers* specify "meditation" during that period (*Second Rule of the Fathers*, ca. 426-27) and finally as one nears the time of the *RB*, it has become "reading" (*Third Rule of the Fathers*, ca. 535). Benedict's use of *vacare* and *lectio* places his spiritual practice within that tradition in which reading, repetition, reflection, and prayer form a unified engagement with the revelation of God in the monk's primary contemplative medium, the Bible. In later monastic writings, most famously in the 12th century *Ladder of Monks* by the Carthusian prior Guigo II, these would be presented as formal steps leading

one toward contemplation. With Benedict we are still in the less precisely programmed ambit of early monastic spirituality.

This focus on biblical texts as preparation for prayer is reminiscent also of Cassian's method of unceasing prayer described earlier, in which a single verse of Psalm 69(70) is used a repeated formula whenever the mind is unable to read or pray. As noted, Benedict uses the same verse to begin the day hours of the Divine Office and for refectory rituals (*RB* 17.3, 18.1, 35.17). In his portrait of the profoundly humble monk in the 12th step of humility, Benedict depicts him as "constantly saying to himself in [his] heart what the tax-collector in the Gospel said, with eyes fixed to the earth, 'Lord, I am not worthy, I a sinner, to lift my eyes to heaven' (Luke 18:13)." Here we see text, repetition, and prayer converging in realization of full human spiritual potential. The monk is constantly aware of his sinfulness, stands in prayer as if already at the "fearful judgment," but he trusts in God's mercy, for in him love has cast out fear.

Gregory the Great

Gregory, heir to both Augustine and the ascetic spirituality of John Cassian, became the primary interpreter of the Bible for medieval monasticism. Born into a noble Roman family around the year 540, Gregory served in the civil administration of the city of Rome before becoming a monk after his father's death. Despite traditional assumptions to the contrary, Gregory was not a "Benedictine," even if he may have known of Benedict and perhaps had seen the *RB* as well. He spent several years in Constantinople as the pope's legate to the imperial court. A few years after his return to Rome he was elected pope in 590, restoring vigor to the office and to the missionary outreach of the Roman Church to northern Europe and Britain. Gregory retained nostalgia for the contemplative dimension of the monastic life, evident in his letters and other works. Although his writings did not cover the same vastness

of biblical terrain as those of some of his predecessors, Gregory's combination of monastic sensitivity to Scripture, pastoral attention to the challenges of the Christian life, and the *auctoritas* conferred by his papacy made him a dominant presence in medieval monastic culture. Gregory has commonly been viewed as a watershed figure: his pontificate signaled a new era in the west and is often viewed as the start of the Middle Ages. For our purposes, Gregory represents the summation of the earlier monastic tradition of biblical interpretation focused on spiritual progress.

Consultation of any medieval library catalog or the innumerable manuscripts of homilies read at the monastic liturgy or in the refectory shows the esteem and affection for Gregory's explanations of the Bible (Deleeuw 1985:861-69, Étaix et al. 2005:70-88). His homilies on the Gospels and the prophecy of Ezekiel, as well as his lengthy meditations on the Book of Job (known as the *Moralia*), were staple texts throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. A fragment of a commentary on the *Song of Songs* (for Song 1:1-8) has survived, but because most of the extant manuscripts preserved it as part of an eleventh-century commentary that was obviously not by Gregory, there were serious doubts, now resolved, about the its authenticity (Bélanger 1984: 15-28). The *Dialogues*, with their lives of Italian saints and an entire book devoted to Benedict of Nursia, were more important for promoting the cult and inspiring the iconography of Benedict than for their spiritual content (with an important exception that will be noted below), and have even been suspected of being a later compilation (Clark 1987, 2003; rebuttal by Meyvaert 2004 and Del Santo 2010). A lengthy commentary on 1 Kings (=1 Samuel in the Hebrew and most modern Bibles), traditionally attributed to Gregory, seems to have been unknown before the twelfth century, and its most recent editor considers it to be a pastiche made at that time (Vogüé 1996; cf. Ruggini/Cracco 2009). This suspect commentary contains the only direct quotation from the

Rule of Benedict in the Gregorian corpus, casting doubt on the traditional suppositions about Gregory's intimate knowledge of the *RB*.

It is now understood that Gregory's importance for later Latin monasticism lay not in his living according to the *RB* or actively promoting it, but in his role as exemplary interpreter of scripture. Gregory's influence was also widely diffused throughout Isidore's copious writings (which largely consisted of recycled material) and by later monastic authors such as Bede the Venerable. In Defensor of Ligugé's *Scintillae*, a seventh-century thematic compilation of brief passages from major authors, the most frequently included texts—apart from Isidore's citations of earlier authors, including Gregory—are from the *Homilies on the Gospels*. Hildemar similarly cites Gregory more than anyone besides Isidore (the *Moralia* appear most frequently, but references to the *Homilies on the Gospels* abound).

Gregory's style was not as crisp as Augustine's, nor were his exegetical investigations as scientific as Jerome's, but his constant attention to the practical implications of biblical texts—specifically their moral application—gave his writings a uniquely personal quality. His commentaries were first delivered orally, whether to his monks in Constantinople before his election as bishop of Rome (the *Moralia*, early 580s), to the laity in Rome on Sundays and feast days (*Homilies on the Gospels*, 590-93), or to a more specialized lay and monastic audience (*Homilies on Ezekiel*, presented during the course of a month in 593-94; *Commentary on Song of Songs*, probably between 594-98). Gregory modeled a hermeneutic that his readers and auditors could then apply to other biblical texts and to their own lives. As he states in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, biblical allegory provides a "machine for the soul distant from God, to raise it up to God" (2). Gregory's role was to step forward from his own solitary meditation on the Bible to share its fruits with others. This engagement with an audience was central to his method: "I know there are many things in the sacred word that I was

unable to understand by myself. But when put in front of my brothers, then I understood them. … what I teach, I am learning among you—truly, I confess, I am often listening along with you as I speak!" (Ezek II.2.1). As we shall see, for Gregory the sharing one's own mystical experience with others was an imperative of the spiritual life.

Gregory's principal themes emerged directly from his own monastic reading and prayer. Foremost among them were the central role of compunction and tears in the Christian life; the passage from the active life to contemplation, and then back to action; the illumination of the soul and granting of spiritual vision through grace.

Gregory's emphasis on compunction is traceable to Cassian, though it plays a more dynamic role for the so-called "Doctor of Desire" (Leclercq 1982:29-32; Straw 1988:213-35). As we have seen, for Cassian *conpunctio* was a term inclusive of various forms of intense spiritual experience, whether sorrow for sins or gratitude for God's mercy, and was closely associated with the phenomenon of physical tears. For Gregory, compunction yoked to desire was the motor of contemplative progress: "Hearts are wounded so that they might be healed…. The soul struck by the darts of his love...burns with desire for contemplation.... She has been brought back to health by a blow, called back to the safety of deep restfulness by the disturbance of his love. When the wounded mind begins to pant for God, despising all of the offerings of this world, it stretches itself by desire toward the homeland above." (*Mor.* 6.42; cf. *Hom. Ezek.* II.2.8 and II.10.21). Citing the famous verse "I am *wounded* by love" (*Song of Songs* 2:5) according to the Septuagint rather than the Vulgate's rendering of the less vivid Hebrew ("I faint with love"), Gregory echoes for a Latin audience the mystical interpretations of the *Song of Songs* by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. The choice serves him perfectly: *vulnerata ego in caritate* unites the intense pain of *conpunctio* with its cause and reward, divine love. His own *Commentary on the Song of Songs* does not extend to that key phrase, but

he does characterize the soul's burning desire for God as being like a kiss in which it feels the sting (*compungitur*) of God's love (18).

Such emphasis on experience is the hallmark of the *Moralia*, in which Gregory developed his theory of compunction most famously as the searing consideration of "where one was" (mired in sin), "where one will be" (at the final judgment), "where one is" (the troubles of the present life), and "where one is not" (heaven) (*Mor.* 23.41). His scheme is reducible to a simple contrast between the compunction prompted by fear of punishment and that arising from love, the grief of regret (*Hom. Ezek.* II.10.20; cf. *Dial.* 3.34). One of Gregory's biblical types for this range of compunctions is the Apostle Paul. Alluding to Paul's mystical experience as described in 2 Corinthians 12, Gregory describes how the Apostle saw both the promise of heaven and the reality of mortal existence: "after the vision of inner light that flashed in his soul by grace in a ray of splendor, he returned to himself: and he found insights into both the good things that are not here, and the bad things that are" (*Mor.* 23.41). This pattern of *excessus/processus* to "higher" realities, followed by a *recessus* to mundane existence, is characteristic of Gregory's understanding of the contemplative and active lives, and one of his principal debts to Augustine's understanding mystical experience.

Gregory's analysis of compunction echoed the ecstatic language of Cassian, with its emphasis on ineffability: "It is one thing when someone looks within and feels compunction, terrified by fear of his evils. It is another thing to feel compunction while gazing upon the joys above, invigorated by hope and freedom from care (*securitas*). While the first compunction prompts painful and sad tears, this one leads to joyful tears. For it is called 'exultation' when an ineffable joy is conceived in the mind—a joy that cannot be hidden or expressed in words" (*Mor.* 24.10). One can compare Cassian's two compunctions, one

issuing in "shouts of unbearable joy" and the other "hidden within the solitude of profound quiet (*taciturnitas*)" (*Conf.* 9.27).

The musings spread throughout the vastness of the *Moralia* came into sharper focus and found a practical application in the *Homilies on the Gospels*, which were frequently heard by medieval monks and nuns at the office of Vigils for Sundays and major feasts, as well as being familiar to them from private reading. An example of Gregory's approach can be found in his homily on the blind man on the road into Jericho (*Hom. 2*, on Luke 18:31-43). The hermeneutical method is typical: first, the historical sense of the text, then its "mystical" interpretation. As Henri De Lubac noted, Gregory thereby "reproduces the internal logic of the Christian mystery" (De Lubac 1998:132-34). In this homily, Gregory states, "In historical terms (*iuxta historiam*) we don't know who the blind man was, but we do know who he signifies mystically (*per mysterium*). The blind man is the human race, which since its expulsion from the joys of Paradise in its earliest ancestor has been deprived of the brightness of heavenly light, and has suffered the darkness of its damnation. Now, however, it is illuminated by the presence of its Redeemer, so that through desire it now sees the joys of inner light, and so can walk the path of life, doing good" (*Hom. Gospels* 2.2; cf. 2.8).

With that context established, Gregory returned to the biblical text, still playing on the tension between humankind's present state and its intended condition: "Whoever knows the darkness of his blindness, whoever is aware that he lacks this light of eternity, cries out from the depths of his heart, cries out with the voice of his soul, 'Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!'" (*Hom. Gospels* 2.3). But like the hordes of Jericho trying to silence the blind man's cry for healing, the memories of our sins—the "tumult of carnal thoughts"—crowd in to silence our prayer for help. A desperate cry is the only hope of catching Jesus' attention. And so it does: he stops, he turns, he restores sight (*lumen*): "God is now fixed in the heart,

and the light (*lux*) that was lost is restored." This light surpasses all earthly rewards, and must be one's total aim: "let us seek the light, not a light that is contained in space, that has an end in time, that changes with the interruption of the nights, that we along with the animals can perceive, but let us seek the light that we can see with only the angels, that has neither beginning nor end."

In his *Homilies on Ezekiel* Gregory explored more fully the contemplative experiences hinted at in the *Moralia* and the *Homilies on the Gospels*. Originally delivered in late 593-early 594 in a time of peril and barbarian invasion, these homilies were thus the last of Gregory's three major biblical expositions. He commented only on the opening and closing chapters of the prophecy (Book I: Ez. 1:1-4:3, Book II: Ez. 40:1-47, with reference also to the Song of Songs). In the homilies he depicts a cyclical pattern of compunction, self-transcendence through being "suspended" in contemplation, and then a feeling of being pushed back down (a *reverberatio*) into the mundane reality of life in the secular world (*Hom. Ezek.* I.10.29, II.1.16-18, II.5.9; Gillet 1975:50-53). Gregory also interpreted the classic distinction between active and contemplative ways of life, a distinction traceable to Greek philosophy but expressed by Christians according to biblical types (Leah—Rachel, Martha—Mary). Contemplation is fleeting in the present life, constrained as it is by mortal bodies, turbulent thoughts, and pressing obligations of charitable care for others, but the recollection of those moments of transcendence can energize secular action (*Hom. Ezek.* I.5.12-13, II.2.3, II.2.11-14, II.7.10-11). Gregory equally noted the danger of making false assumptions about spiritual progress when ephemeral experiences of "heavenly grace" are mistaken for evidence of perfection. The contrary events of daily life remind one of imperfection and encourage the "gathering of oneself" required for contemplation (*Hom. Ezek.* II.7.12).

This theme of recollection, Augustinian in inspiration, pervades Gregory's writing on contemplation. As he wrote, "By means of tears of compunction we should not seek what is earthly or transitory. He alone suffices who made all things. Let us then transcend all things by means of desire, so that we might gather the mind into [the] One" (*Hom. Ezek.* II.10.21; cf. II.5.9). Gregory presented his cosmology in another of the homilies, in which he describes the four "voices" (*voces*) that speak to human beings, each corresponding to a plane of existence ranging from the "voice of the flesh" that stirs up thoughts of resentment and other distracting images during prayer; the "voice under heaven (*firmamentum*)" that is the soul's own voice, a spirit subject to both good and ill influences but nonetheless lively and intelligent; the "voice from heaven" that communicates the angelic experience of continual contemplation; finally, the "voice above heaven" (cf. Ezek. 1:25-26), the soul's apprehension of the God beyond limit, understanding, and sight, conceivable only in such elusive and transcendent terms (*Hom. Ezek.* I.8.13-16).

Gregory placed a particular emphasis on the obligation to encourage others by telling them about one's own mystical experiences (*Hom. Ezek.,* I.5.13, I.10.4, II.2.4, II.3.9-11, II.7.11). In the homilies he is obviously sharing his, and in the *Dialogues* we find a most vivid depiction of personal mysticism in the account of Benedict's vision of the whole of Creation (*Dial.* 2.35). For the most part the *Dialogues* are edifying tales, many clearly patterned on biblical types, meant to show that Italy had saints comparable in spiritual power to those of Gaul (as described in the *Dialogues* of Sulpitius Severus; Meyvaert 2004: 75-77). But here at the end of Book Two, Gregory crowns his account of Benedict's wondrous life with a brief, but thickly described, episode in which his hero, already known for prophetic visions, is granted a glimpse of the whole world gathered into a single luminous ray. Gregory explains this as a sighting of the divine light, which, being without limit, can easily contain even

within that single ray the whole of the visible creation. It has the power to expand Benedict's capacity to comprehend it, taking him "above himself" and "beyond the world" even as *within* himself he is made larger so as to grasp the vision (*Dial.* 2.35.6 and 7; cf. 2.3.5 and 9). This combination of ecstatic and enstatic language, also typical of Augustine, shows Gregory deploying the full range of mystical vocabulary available to him.

"Benedictine" Mysticism after Gregory

As we have seen, Benedict adapted the monastic tradition available to him in existing rules and other writings to the use of his monastery, and foresaw that the norms of his own rule were subject to adaptation and revision by later users (*RB* 18.22). The *RB* itself was never understood by its author to be a self-contained monastic charter, complete in itself and immutable. In his final chapter Benedict points his more zealous monks to the "rule" of Basil for further guidance on monastic perfection. From at least the seventh century, the *RB* was often combined with the *Rule for Monks* of Columbanus, a contemporary of Gregory the Great, and the greatest Irish monastic missionary. Arriving in northern Gaul in 590, Columbanus and his companions would eventually found monasteries across Gaul, Switzerland, and as far as northern Italy. Two monasteries at Luxeuil in northeast Gaul and at Bobbio, between Milan and Genoa, became centers for the Irish mission and spawned several other monasteries. Columbanus' *Rule* and other writings were heavily influenced by Jerome, Cassian, and Basil. Even more than the *RB*, the focus was on ascetic discipline and edification rather than on mystical themes. In the tradition of so-called "mixed rules" (*regulae mixtae*), the *RB* would contribute much of the spiritual and organizational content alongside material drawn from Columbanus' *Rule* and other sources. Few of these mixed rules have survived in the manuscript tradition. This lack of manuscript evidence for other mixed rules suggests that such use of multiple sources is better understood as a "mixed observance"

rather than the creation of formal composite document (Diem 2011). Those that have survived were written by men for monastic women: the *Rule of Donatus of Besançon* (d. 660) and the *Rule of a Certain Father for Virgins* attributed to Waldebert of Luxeuil (d. 668).

The growing prominence of the *RB* in the mixed-observance monasteries made it an obvious resource for the Frankish reform of monasticism begun in the mid-eighth century (Semmler 1983, 1993; Diem 2011:70-77). The key figure in the early ninth-century culmination of this process, Benedict of Aniane (d. 821), made the *RB* the fixed norm for monastic observance but regarded immersion in other monastic sources to be an integral part of monastic formation. Thus in the morning his monks listened to readings from other rules, and in the evening they read homilies by monastic and other authors (Ardo, *Life of Benedict of Aniane* 38.7). To support this awareness of the broader tradition, he created the remarkable *Codex regularum*, a compilation of all existing Latin monastic rules known to him (Bonnerue 1999: vol. 1, pp. 53-160), and the *Concordia regularum*, an edition of the *RB* in which each chapter is followed by pertinent extracts from other rules. It was said that Benedict of Aniane gathered these texts to refute those lukewarm and lazy monks who questioned the value of reading ancient sources, "not knowing that blessed Benedict received his rule from others, dexterously creating a single sheaf out of many" (Bonnerue 1999: vol. 2, p. 3). A millennium later this exercise of reinserting the Rule into the stream of monastic tradition was a guiding principle for the *Ressourcement* of Benedictine monasticism after Vatican Council II.

When the *RB* was deployed in new contexts such as the Frankish monastic reforms, it had to be interpreted and applied in a manner cognizant of new social and religious conditions (e.g., the liturgical and theological developments that made a daily celebration of the Eucharist a feature of monastic life) as well as of monastic practices not featured in the

RB. The resultant commentaries on the *RB* and the customaries that describe monastic observance in specific communities are a valuable source of information about spiritual and liturgical practices. The richest of the commentaries is the remarkable mid-eighth century *Expositio Regulae* (also known as the *Tractatus in Regulam*) of Hildemar of Corbie (d. 850), which survives in the form of detailed notes left by his students (Zelzer 1981). For all of its wealth of information about daily life in a monastery of the Frankish reform, however, even Hildemar's commentary does not suggest any fundamental change in monastic spirituality though one can see shifts in practice. In Hildemar's *Expositio* Gregory the Great's mysticism has been fully integrated into a Benedictine milieu. For example, Hildemar interprets Benedict's evocation at the end of the *RB*'s Prologue of a monk who runs on the path of the commandments with "expanded heart" (*dilatatio cordis*) as meaning a transcendence of self, the created order, and even the angels so as to fix the eye of the heart" on God (*Expos.*, 70f; cf. 168f). When explaining Benedict's chapter on the psalmody of the Divine Office (*RB* 19), Hildemar turns around the theme of God's watchful eyes on the monks at prayer, making it instead about the mind's enjoyment of the "invisible light" during the Divine Office, something impossible at other times because of earthly preoccupations (315). Similarly, Gregory lurks in Hildemar's view that contemplation is possible only for someone who has been engaged in the active life and will return to it. Using the classic typological figures of Leah and Rachel, Hildemar writes of the necessity of doing manual labor (the "active" life for monks) before enjoying contemplation and tears during *lectio divina* (478).

Hildemar echoes Gregory's four kinds of compunction (*Expos.*, 173), and cites the claim in the *Moralia* that true prayer relies more on bitter sighs of compunction than on words (*Expos.*, 320; *Mor.* 33.43). He is concerned that monks have the opportunity to read with some privacy so that they can feel moved to compunction and tears (483). He also

mentions that some people may suddenly be overcome with contemplation (*habet contemplationem*) and should therefore lay aside their book or their work and go to the oratory lest they be deprived of the gift of tears (*Expos.*, 500). He parses Benedict's recommendation of Lenten prayer with tears, reading, and compunction (*RB* 49.4) to mean that prayer should be accompanied by tears and reading by compunction, which he defines as sighs (*Expos.*, 491).

Hildemar provides clear indications that by his time the earlier distinction between psalmody and prayer, and the custom of leaving a period for silent prayer after each psalm of the Divine Office, were no longer current. He therefore struggles to interpret Benedict's prescription in *RB* 20 that "in community, prayer should always be brief, and when the superior gives the signal, all should rise," which referred to the intervals for prayer between psalms. Hildemar supposes that this means personal prayer offered while the priest is praying on behalf of the community, particularly the inaudible priestly prayers of the Mass, when it is appropriate for each worshipper to offer personal prayers (*Expos.*, 321). He makes two suggestions for what Benedict meant by the superior's signal ending prayer, neither of them about the ancient practice of silent prayer following each psalm (*Expos.*, 322). Even so, he is aware of the "custom of the Greeks," who pray frequently but briefly lest while prostrate in prayer they be distracted by vain thoughts, and states that this is why Benedict emphasized that prayer should be "short and pure" (*RB* 20.4; *Expos.*, 320, cf. 172). When commenting on Benedict's chapter on the "Tools of Good Works," with its prescription that one "willingly listen to holy readings and frequently devote oneself to prayer," Hildemar breaks Benedict's implicit link between *lectio* and *oratio*, and resituates the impulse for prayer to the workplace. He recommends the practice "of the Greeks" for such spontaneous acts of prayer because it would be brief and not unduly interfere with one's obedience, i.e., work

assignment. Hildemar even cites Cassian, repurposing Cassian's description of such prayer as it was used in a liturgical context to the very different context of the kitchen or workshop (*Expos.*, 172f).

These indications of a shift in practice begin to suggest the spirituality associated with later Benedictines such as the Congregation of Cluny (founded in the tenth century), for whom a lengthy Divine Office laden with extra devotions and the daily celebration of a richly ceremonial conventual Mass became hallmarks of Benedictine spirituality. The earlier monastic interplay of word and prayer, speech and silence, traceable to Cassian and through him to the Egyptian desert, had yielded to a highly ritualized and symbolic religious culture that opened the door to new forms of mystical experience such as visions and eucharistic miracles. With the rise of Scholasticism and full impact of the writings of Ps-Dionysius, the climate of western spirituality was transformed. Benedictines lost their dominant role in western religious life, and felt the influence of these new spiritual currents. The classic western monastic tradition, with its biblical spirituality shaped by customs brought from the Christian East, informed by the Platonic mysticism of Origen and Augustine, and elaborated by Gregory the Great, had served Latin monasticism well. It never disappeared, and has recently enjoyed a modest revival, but has been for centuries only one part of a much richer conversation.

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