



The Dialogues of Saint Gregory the Great (Christian Roman Empire Series)

Edmund G. Gardner

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Having witnessed the endless string of disasters that shattered his beloved Italy in the late 6th century AD, Pope Saint Gregory the Great set down in the *Dialogues* a sequence of tales to help his contemporaries escape from their worldly troubles and contemplate eternal life.

Peter, Gregory's interlocutor, laments that he has never heard of anyone famous in Italy for virtue. To set him straight, Gregory offers an entire litany of stories of Italian saints--from Honoratus of Funda who pinned a great rock to a mountainside to prevent it from crushing an abbey, to the holy virgin Tarsilla who received a vision of Pope Felix immediately before her death. Several of these stories are well known even to this day, while others, like the story of Florentius and his ill-fated bear, are merely strange and picturesque.

Perhaps most importantly, Gregory's *Dialogues* contain an entire book dedicated to the life of Saint Benedict of Nursia. This portion of the *Dialogues* represents the most detailed and lengthy biography of Benedict from a near contemporary and is the source of many of the stories told about this important saint.

Often viewed as mere folk-history, the *Dialogues* served a higher function than simple history--they were a spiritual exhortation to Gregory's worn and weary countrymen. To modern readers, these tales of visions, miracles and extraordinary Christian virtue paint a vivid portrait of daily life amid the wreckage of once-prosperous Roman Italy. In addition, the *Dialogues* offer a glimpse into the theology of one of the great minds of the Church during the time when Roman authority ebbed forever in the West and ecclesiastical authority emerged to fill the void.

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