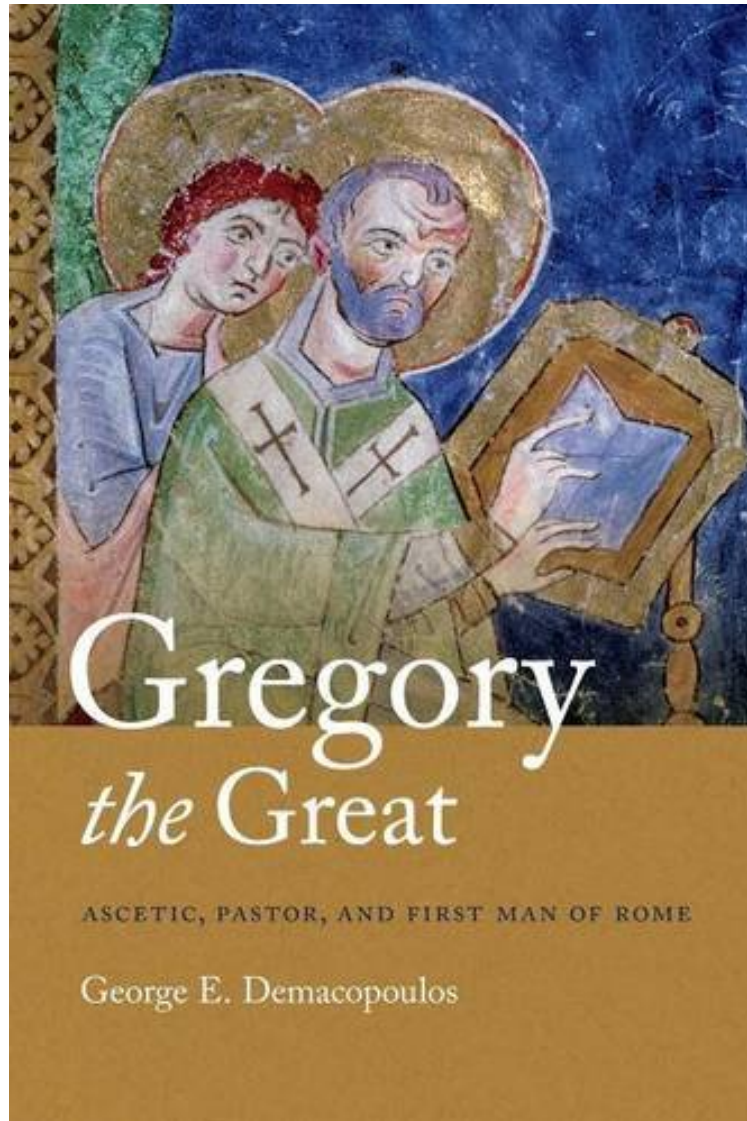


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Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome

George E. Demacopoulos

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#1012431 in Books 2015-10-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .60 x 6.00l, 1.00 #File Name: 0268026211240 pages | File size: 53.Mb

George E. Demacopoulos : Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. What drove Gregory the Great? According to George Demacopoulos, asceticism. By C. C. I. Fenn John Calvin called him "the last good pope" in his Institutes. This book takes an interesting look at Gregory the Great, a man who lived during a time of great chaos and transition. In this work, Demacopoulos argues that Gregory can only be properly understood by keeping his others-focused asceticism in

mind. Since this is the first book that I've read about the 'First Man of Rome', I don't have much to compare it to but I do feel like I have a much better understanding of who he was and what drove him. Although there's plenty about Gregory that I have issue with (for example, the value he placed on relics), there is also a great deal that I admire (his focus on humility in leadership). Since this is a book that deals in large part with Gregory's motivations, it leaves out some important parts of Gregory's story. For instance, not much is said about the reforms he tried to implement in the area of worship. From what I understand, that was a pretty important part of his work (His name has given us the term 'Gregorian Chant'). Nevertheless, this is a good read though a little specialized and would probably be better as a follow-up to a more generalized biography on the man and his times.

Gregory the Great (bishop of Rome from 590 to 604) is one of the most significant figures in the history of Christianity. His theological works framed medieval Christian attitudes toward mysticism, exegesis, and the role of the saints in the life of the church. The scale of Gregory's administrative activity in both the ecclesial and civic affairs of Rome also helped to make possible the formation of the medieval papacy. Gregory disciplined malcontent clerics, negotiated with barbarian rulers, and oversaw the administration of massive estates that employed thousands of workers. Scholars have often been perplexed by the two sides of Gregory: the monkish theologian and the calculating administrator. George E. Demacopoulos's study is the first to advance the argument that there is a clear connection between the pontiff's thought and his actions. By exploring unique aspects of Gregory's ascetic theology, wherein the summit of Christian perfection is viewed in terms of service to others, Demacopoulos argues that the very aspects of Gregory's theology that made him distinctive were precisely the factors that structured his responses to the practical crises of his day. With a comprehensive understanding of Christian history that resists the customary bifurcation between Christian East and Christian West, Demacopoulos situates Gregory within the broader movements of Christianity and the Roman world that characterize the shift from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages. This fresh reading of Gregory's extensive theological and practical works underscores the novelty and nuance of Gregory as thinker and bishop. "Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome has the potential to be the most important intellectual biography of Pope Gregory I to appear since the publication in 1988 of Carole Straw's landmark study, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*. Demacopoulos proposes a new interpretive paradigm by insisting that the 'problem of the two Gregories' is not really a problem at all: Gregory's ascetic and pastoral theology, he argues, informs and structures his administrative practices. This important insight will have significant impact on future research." Kristina Sessa, Ohio State University

"One puts this book down thinking about its subject in a new way, for Demacopoulos has been able to use the structure of Gregory's thought to make sense of its author. Softening as he does the caesura of Gregory's exchanging secular for religious life, Demacopoulos allows us to see his life as having been less disjointed than it has hitherto seemed to be, for the skills he had exercised in his early days as prefect of the city would be useful when he became pope." Marginalia "The author makes an argument for the deep intellectual and spiritual connections between two different aspects of Gregory: the theologian focused on asceticism and the shrewd administrator of the Church of Rome." Library Journal "[T]he book will be best read by readers who are already familiar with Gregory the Great and the controversial issues surrounding him. . . . The author has done a good job of exposing the reader to complexities, even contradictions of a man worthy of being called great." America