

PRECONDITION TO MIRACLE.
THE CONSTRUCTION OF DISCERNMENT
AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE WORKS
OF SULPICIUS SEVERUS AND GREGORY OF TOURS

In his *Life of St. Martin*, Bishop Gregory of Tours (538-593 A.D.) related the following miracle by his patron saint:

«I shall also tell this story about how the insane tricks of demons are exposed at his church. While a man named Aquilinus was hunting with his father in the forests of Francia, he developed a terrible trembling when a hostile [demon] ambushed him. He had a spasm in his heart, and then he seemed to have lost his senses. His parents realized that he was being injured by the attack of a demon; but as is the custom of nonbelievers, they brought bandages and potions for him from fortune-tellers and sooth-sayers. But when nothing worked as usual, their grief compelled them to seek the ready assistance of St. Martin. They said: «He who, as we hear, [once] exposed a ghost who had been venerated in the name of a false religion can [now] reveal the cunning in these attacks». They moved their son from the region and brought him to the holy church. There he prayed, deprived himself with long fasts, and constantly requested the saint's assistance. After he had lived a long time in this faith, his trembling was completely removed, and he recovered his senses as he had them previously»¹.

¹ *Narrabo et illud, qualiter diabolicae artis insaniae ad eius basilicam denudentur. Quidam Aquilinus nomine, dum venatione cum patre suo in silvas Franciae exerceret, pavorem pessimum, inimico insidiante, incurrit. Erat enim ei tremor cordis, et interea videbatur ex sensu. Parentes vero eius intellegentes, eum diaboli inmissione mulcari, ut mos rusticorum habet, a sortilegis et hariolis ligamenta ei et potiones deferebant. Sed cum nihil valeret ex more, sancti Martini auxilia prumpti, dolore cogente, requirunt, dicentes: «Potest is insidiis nudare malitiam, qui detexit umbra, ut audivimus, falso religionis nomine adoratum». Quem de regione commotum miserunt ad sanctam basilicam, ibique in oratione cum summa parcitate se continens, opem sancti poscebat assidue. Cumque in hac fide diutius commorasset, omni pavore dempto, sensum, ut habuerat ante, recepit. Greg. Tur. Mart. 1,26: MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, I, 2, p. 151; transl. by R. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, Princeton 1993, pp. 219-220.*

While there are many elements of interest in this vignette, this essay shall focus particularly on the miraculous ability of the saint to ascertain and expose unseen forces. More specifically, it is in the works of Sulpicius Severus (360-410 A.D.) and, later, Gregory of Tours that this saintly power of discriminating sight, or «discernment», shall be explored. In so doing, I hope to assemble a literary model or *tòpos* of the «discerning saint» in Frankish Gaul, demonstrating the forms this «true sight» takes and the occasions on which it occurs. For it was another way in which, by first recognizing and revealing the «true nature» of an event, the power of the saint could be effected. Saints might exorcise the possessed, heal the sick², and free the imprisoned³, but they often only performed these miracles after just as miraculously perceiving the «real» cause of the dilemma. 'With great power comes great responsibility' — it was this ability to discern deeply that allowed the saint to wield super-natural power responsibly, or better, justly.

If, however, this ability to discern was the initial «key virtue» requisite for the saint to wield power justly, how did the saint come to acquire this extra-sensory perception in the first place? At first glance, the answer appears plain — discernment came from the same source as the power of the saint; namely, God. But to make this assumption would be to ignore the long legacy of spiritual behavior left to the Frankish saint by previous traditions, whose rules influenced the manner in which the saint both acquired and demonstrated discernment.

In fact, the concept of *discretio* did not spontaneously develop in Gaul, but rather was borrowed from a tradition of ascetic behavior long practiced in Egypt. As Clare Stancliffe points out, the Egyptian monk, through prayer and ascetic practices, «co-operates with the Holy Spirit. His body is purified from fleshly desires, and his mind or heart (the two are not differentiated in Coptic) is also restored to purity; and so 'the eyes of his heart'⁴ are opened, and he receives the gift of spiritual perception»⁵. A guide for this rigorous lifestyle, the immensely popular *Life of St. Antony* by Athanasius, was widely disseminated in the West shortly after its publication in ca. 357 A.D. The connection between the expanse of this Egyptian asceticism and Gaul

² See A. Rousselle, *From Sanctuary to Miracle-Worker: Healing in Fourth Century Gaul*, transl. E. Forster, *Religion, Ritual and the Sacred*, eds. R. Forster and O. Ranum, Baltimore 1982, pp. 110-117; J. Kitchen, *Saints, Doctors and Soothsayers: The Dynamics of Healing in Gregory of Tours's De virtutibus Sancti Martini*, *Florilegium* 12, 1993, pp. 15-32; C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer*, Oxford 1983, pp. 249-256; Van Dam, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-115.

³ For the importance to bishops of freeing captives, which petrifies into a *tòpos* and is attributed to saints, see W. Klingshirn, *Charity and Power: Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul*, *JRS* 75, 1985, pp. 183-203; Van Dam, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-105.

⁴ *Vita prima S. Pachomi* 22, ed. F. Halkin, Brussels 1932, p. 14.

⁵ Stancliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 234. See also P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge Mass. and London 1978, pp. 94-96.

was further established by Sulpicius Severus, only 3 years after he wrote what would become the proto-typical *Vita* (that of St. Martin), with the publication of his *Dialogues*⁶ (ca. 400 A.D.). These sources were to have a tremendous influence upon the paradigm both Sulpicius and Gregory of Tours would use in their description of a saint. Yet, if we are to look back, as Stancliffe suggests, to this eastern Christian model for the preconditions of western saintly discernment⁷, I would suggest an equal glance at the early eastern *pagan* philosopher-ascetics; for the pagan holy man was not so far removed by his methods from the Christian in his quest for purity and «true sight».

Following this thread, it is useful to examine the case of Apollonius of Tyana (d. ca. 98 A.D.), a pagan holy man who also demonstrated miraculous powers of discernment, seeing the unseeable and understanding the true nature of the seen. For ex., Apollonius was called upon by the populace of Ephesus to cure the town of a plague. Immediately upon his arrival, Apollonius walked straight towards an old beggar that had his eyes closed and who, according to the people, was a visitor. Perceiving him to be the cause of the town's ills, Apollonius instructed the people to stone the beggar to death. When the first stone struck, the beggar opened his eyes, which gleamed with fire.

«[T]he Ephesians realized it was a spirit and threw so many stones that a pile of them built up over him. After a while Apollonius told them to remove the stones and to discover the beast that they had killed. When they uncovered the man they thought they had stoned, he had vanished; instead they saw a dog resembling a Molossian hound but the size of the largest lion, crushed by the stones and spewing foam like a dog with rabies»⁸.

This was not the only instance that Apollonius used his heightened sense of perception to discriminate the truth from the perceived⁹. It was, however, a situation that Christian holy men would later find themselves insolicited to

⁶ The relevant section on Egyptian asceticism is found in *Dialogue* 1,10-26.

⁷ Stancliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-241. Note that Stancliffe does not see the East as sole crucible within which western ascetics / saints formed. Of the elements that do derive from the East, however, I agree with her conclusion that discernment is one; so too P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford 1978.

⁸ Ξυνήκαν οἱ Ἐφέσιοι τοῦ δαίμονος καὶ κατελίθωσαν οὕτως αὐτόν, ὡς κολωνὸν λίθων περὶ αὐτὸν χάσασθαι. διαλιπὼν δὲ ὀλίγον ἐκέλευσεν ἀφελεῖν τοὺς λίθους, καὶ τὸ θηρίον, ὃ ἀπεκτόνασι, γνῶναι. γυμνωθέντος οὖν τοῦ βεβλησθαι δοκούντος, ὃ μὲν ἠφάνιστο, κύων δὲ τὸ μὲν εἶδος ὁμοῖος τῷ ἐκ Μολοσσίων, μέγεθος δὲ κατὰ τὸν μέγιστον λέοντα, ζυγτετριμμένος ὄφθη ὑπὸ τῶν λίθων, καὶ παραπτῶν ἄφρον, ὥσπερ οἱ λυττῶντες: Philostr. *v.A.* 4,10: *LCIL*, I (1912), p. 364; transl. by C.P. Jones, Harmondsworth 1970, p. 93.

⁹ For ex., see Philostr., *op. cit.*, 4,25, *edit. cit.*, I, pp. 402-408; *transl. cit.* pp. 94-96, where

intercede on behalf of the populace because of their ability to discern the true cause of a problem.

Apollonius was not secretive about the source of his true sight. To the contrary, he was rather candid about it, announcing that radiant eyes that «recognize gods, know heroes, and unmask insubstantial ghosts when they hide in mortal form»¹⁰ come to those who devote themselves to the practice of Pythagorean philosophy. For Apollonius, this entailed a vegetarian diet, abstinence from alcohol and sex, and minimal clothing and shelter.

Iamblichus (250-330 A.D.), another renowned Pythagorean philosopher, also extolled the primary virtue of this abstemious lifestyle:

«[It] gives the soul true vision and clears the mind blinded by other practices, so that [one] may see the real principles and causes of all there is¹¹... Only to the one who sees with [the divine] eye, having strengthened and articulated it with proper aids, is the true nature of things perceptible»¹².

Like Apollonius, Iamblichus asserts that discernment, or the «divine eye», is something which could be cultivated «with the proper aids»; that is, through the practice of the rigorous Pythagorean lifestyle. And also like Apollonius, Iamblichus was willing to exhibit the efficacy of this austerity:

«[He and his students were walking along a road when] suddenly Iamblichus even while conversing was lost in thought, as though his voice were cut off, and for some moments he fixed his eyes steadily on the ground and then looked up at his friends and called to them in a loud voice: 'Let us go by another road, for a dead body has lately been carried along this way' ... And very soon those who had buried [a] dead man came back. [When they were asked] whether they had passed along this road, they replied 'We had to, for there was no other road'»¹³.

Apollonius discerns the true nature of a Vampire; and *op. cit.*, 6,27; *edit. cit.*, II, pp. 106-110; *transl. cit.*, pp. 158-159, where Apollonius discerns that the cause of the problem is a Satyr.

¹⁰ Διαγιγνώσκειν μὲν θεόν, γινώσκειν δὲ ἥρωα, σκιοειδῆ δ' ἐλέγχειν φαντάσματα, ὅτε ψεύδοιντο εἶδη ἀνθρώπων: Philostr., *op. cit.*, 6,11, *edit. cit.*, II, p. 42; *transl. cit.*, p. 149.

¹¹ Ὅμματοποιὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ὡς ἀληθῶς καὶ καθαρτικὰ τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν ἕλλων ἐπιτηδευμάτων τοῦ νοῦ τυφλώσεως, πρὸς τὸ κατιδεῖν δυνηθῆναι τὰς ὄντως τῶν ὄλων ἀρχὰς καὶ αἰτίας ἐνφοκίσθη τοῖς Ἑλλησι: Iamb. *v.P.* 6,31: *SGRT* (1937), with recensions by U. Klein, 1975, p. 19; transl. by G. Clark, Liverpool 1989, pp. 12-13.

¹² Μόνω γὰρ αὐτῷ διαβλέψαντι καὶ οἷς προσῆκε βοηθήμασι τονωθέντι καὶ διαρθρωθέντι ἡ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἀλήθεια διόραται: Iamb., *op. cit.*, 16,70, *edit. cit.*, p. 40; *transl. cit.*, p. 30.

¹³ Τὸν νοῦν ἐπιστήσας ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος μεταξὺ διαλεγόμενος, ὡσπερ ἀποκοπεῖς τὴν φωνήν, καὶ τὰ δμ-

Upon turning to the early Christian tradition, one finds little difference in the austere life of the Christian and Pagan holy man. Both placed themselves under severe hardships to acquire discernment. But while the Pagan believed that this power could be cultivated through abstinence, the Christian holy man, although arising and thus operating within the paradigm of the pagan philosopher-ascetic, needed something more to acquire *discretio*. And as we surmised earlier, this supplement *was* the grace of God, a charism reserved for the elect few¹⁴. As John Cassian (360-435 A.D.), an influential commentator on desert monasticism, observed, Scripture dictated this true source of discernment:

«[Discernment] is no minor virtue, nor one which can be seized anywhere merely by human effort. It is ours only as a gift of God and we read in the apostle that it is to be numbered among the most outstanding gifts of the Holy Spirit... 'to another [is given] the discernment of spirits' (1 Cor. 12,10)»¹⁵.

It is with this point that Athanasius' account of the *Life of St. Antony* becomes so crucial to the formation of a specifically Christian paradigm of the holy man. For Antony, by word and deed, demonstrated that discernment was at once a divine gift *and* a product of an ascetic lifestyle, the two components never being mutually exclusive¹⁶. This is why Antony could say at one and the same time that:

«Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God»¹⁷

ματα εἰς τὴν γῆν ἀτρεμίζοντα χρόνον τινὰ ἐρείσας, ἀνά τε ἐβλεψεν εἰς τοὺς ἑταίρους, καὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐξεβόησεν· «ἄλλην ὁδὸν πορευόμεθα· νεκρὸς γὰρ ἐντεῦθεν ἐναγχος παρακεχόμεσται.» ...καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν ἐπανήσαν οἱ θάψαντες τὸν τετελευτηκότα... εἰ ταύτην εἶεν παρεληλυθότες τὴν ὁδὸν· οἱ δέ, «ἀναγκαῖον ἦν» ἔφασαν· ἄλλην γὰρ οὐκ ἔχειν: Eun. v.s. 459: *LCIL* (1961), pp. 366-368.

¹⁴ See B. Ward, 'Signs and Wonders'. *Miracles in the Desert Tradition*, StudPatr 17 (2), 1982, ed. E.A. Livingstone, pp. 540-541.

¹⁵ *Est enim non mediocris quaedam virtus nec quae humana passim valeat industria comprehendendi, nisi divina fuerit largitate conlata, siquidem inter nobilissima spiritus sancti dona hanc quoque ita legimus ab apostolo numerari...alii [datur] discretio spiritum (sic ed., lege spirituum): Cassian. conl. 2,1: LesBL, I (1955), p. 111; transl. by C. Luibheid, Mahwah, N.J. 1985, pp. 60-61. While the point I make here is that the gift of discernment is based on Scripture, it is important to note that Cassian sees spirits as being internal — not as «personal, good or evil beings but rather as spirits that rise up in the monk himself ('ascenditum in sese spiritum')». See J.T. Lienhard, 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church, StudPatr, cit., pp. 519-522.*

¹⁶ See J.-C. Guy, *Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers*, Eastern Churches Review 6, 1974, pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ Εἶπε πάλιν, ὅτι εἰσὶ τινες κατατρίψαντες τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα ἐν ἀσκήσει, καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐσχηκέναι αὐτοὺς διάκρισιν, μακρὰν τοῦ θεοῦ γεγονάσιν: *apophth. patr.* Alpha, Anthony the Great, 8:

while

«I believe that when a soul is pure in every way and in its natural state, it is able to see more than the demons, since it has the Lord who reveals things to it»¹⁸.

The gift of divine grace may have been the necessary and distinguishing element of the discerning Christian holy man, but, what is more important for our study of the Frankish saint, Antony had conflated it with the pagan method of discernment through asceticism¹⁹. Thus, the discerning Christian needed first to live an austere life if he hoped to acquire divine grace and, consequently, revelation — a model of behaviour that would be inherited and replicated by the Frankish saint in imitation of the popular *vita* of St. Antony²⁰. Hence, when one examines the characteristics Sulpicius Severus found so praiseworthy of Martin, it is not surprising to read that the saint had such «perseverance and self-discipline in abstinence and fasting [and a] capacity for night vigils and prayer» that even Homer would not have been able to have done him justice²¹. Sulpicius had cast Martin in this mold of the Desert Fathers, adhering to Antony's technique for acquiring and main-

PG 65, coll. 77-78; transl. by Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, London and Oxford 1975, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Credo enim quia animam undique emundatam, et proprietate sua constitutam videre amplius a quo daemones vident. Huiusmodi enim animam, habebit Dominum revelantem illi: Ath. v. Anton. 34,2*, ed. H. Hoppenbrouwers, *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase*, Nijmegen 1960, pp. 124-125; transl. by R.C. Gregg, New York 1980, p. 57. See L. Th. A. Lorié, *Spiritual Terminology in the Latin Translations of the Vita Antonii*, Nijmegen 1955, pp. 107-132; R.M. Peterson, 'The Gift of Discerning Spirits' in *the Vita Antonii*, 16-44, *StudPatr. cit.*, pp. 523-527.

¹⁹ However, abstinence as a requirement for discernment may also derive from Scripture. See *Dan.* 10,2-7.

²⁰ Due to Sulpicius Severus' and Gregory of Tours' conception and articulation of true sight, I have elected to use as their model the anonymous Latin translation of Athanasius' Life of Antony (n. 18) rather than that by Evagrius (*PL* 73, coll. 125-194). For, as Lorié, *op. cit.*, has shown, the conception and articulation of supernatural sight was different between the two translators of the *Vita Antonii*. Evagrius «uses 'videre' to express natural sight as well as supernatural; but in the latter case, Evagrius is careful to avoid such qualifications as might suggest that no more is intended than a strengthening of normal eyesight» (Lorié, *op. cit.*, p. 150). To the contrary, in parallel passages concerning supernatural sight, the anonymous translator remains true to Athanasius' Greek and uses 'videre' to express simply an extension of the normal powers of sight — not, as Evagrius would have it, sight «without any qualifications as to distance, time or space» (Lorié, *op. cit.*, pp. 147; 150). It is the rendering of discernment by this anonymous translator — as that of «extended normal sight» — that Sulpicius Severus and Gregory would later use, as will be demonstrated below.

²¹ *Illam scilicet perseverantiam et temperamentum in abstinentia et in ieiuniis, potentiam in vigiliis et orationibus, noctesque ab eo perinde ac dies actas: Sulp. Sev. Mart. 26,2: SCb I,133 (1967), p. 312; transl. by F.R. Hoare, The Western Fathers, New York 1965, pp. 42-43. Note*

taining discernment²² — a technique that originated with the philosophy of Pythagoras²³.

An examination of the manners in which the Frankish saint demonstrated powers of discernment similarly yields a pattern congruent with an earlier pagan articulation of *discretio*. Much like Apollonius, the saint would recognize the supernatural forces at work behind the actions or afflictions of people (usually in the form of demons). Sulpicius plainly states:

«It is certain that Martin actually saw angels very often, even to the extent of engaging in continuous conversation with them. As for the devil, it was so fully within his power to see him that he recognized him under any form, whether he kept to his own character or changed himself into any of the various shapes of wickedness»²⁴.

However, a closer look at the hagiographic depiction of discernment reveals an interesting detail. While the saint could *optically* perceive supernatural forces, those people who were also in attendance could only perceive these same forces *aurally*, if at all. For ex., Sulpicius reports that Martin was able to see the ghost of a robber whose burial site had been mistaken by the people for one belonging to a martyr. Whereas the ghost appeared to Martin and confessed its true character, «the others who were present had heard a voice speaking in an inexplicable manner but had seen no one»²⁵. Even more typical is the circumstance of brethren overhearing an exchange

the commentary by Fontaine in *Vie de Saint Martin: SCb III*, 135 (1969), pp. 1080-1089. For the practice of asceticism, see also nearly every saint in Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.*

²² C. Fanger also discusses various parallels between the *Vita Antonii* and the *Vita Martini*, but mischaracterizes discernment as «foreknowledge» (p. 43). See her art., *The Dynamics of Holy Power as Reflected in Narrative Structure in the Lives of St. Martin and St. Antony*, *Florelegium* 9, 1987, pp. 35-51.

²³ Note that Athanasius, in his *Life of St. Antony*, made use of the *Life of Pythagoras* by Porphyry. See J.N. Bremmer, *Symbols of Marginality from Early Pythagoreans to Late Antique Monks*, *G&R* 39, 1992, p. 213, n. 3. It is possible that later a more direct example of Pythagorean behaviour would prove influential. Witness the deep respect given by Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Clermont (b. 430), to Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* (*Sidon. epist.* 8,3) — admittedly, this respect is likely a reflection of Sidonius' taste for classical literature.

²⁴ *Constat autem etiam angelos ab eo plerumque visos, ita ut conserto apud eum invicem sermone loquerentur. Diabolum vero ita conspicabilem et subiectum oculis habebat ut, sive se in propria substantia contineret, sive in diversas figuras nequitiae transtulisset, qualibet ab eo sub imagine videretur: Sulp. Sev. Mart. 21,1: SCb, I, 133 (1967), p. 298; transl. cit., p. 36. See the commentary by Fontaine, *Vie de Saint Martin, cit.*, pp. 946-953.*

²⁵ *Mirum in modum, vocem loquentis qui aderant audiebant, personam tamen non videbant: Sulp. Sev. Mart. 11,5, edit. cit., I, p. 276; transl. cit., p. 25; see the commentary by Fontaine, Vie de Saint Martin: SCb II, 134 (1968), pp. 707-712.*

between the saint and the supernatural behind closed doors. Again, Sulpicius relates how he was keeping watch outside Martin's door when a feeling of awe came over him and he heard the «low and practically unintelligible murmur of voices» coming from within the cell. When thoroughly pressed on the matter, Martin confessed to having been regularly visited by both the Apostles and pagan demons²⁶. Like Sulpicius, Gregory also used the brethren's «inferior» sense of hearing as a foil to emphasize the saint's superior ability of true sight: «Very often during the night, when devout men would draw near the [saint's] cell secretly, [they heard noise] resounding as though there was the sound of a great sonorous chanting of psalms»²⁷.

This constructed circumstance, in which the power of the saint to discern is not only demonstrated, but also relatively measured by its comparison to the feeble senses of ordinary men, was also prefigured by an «Antoninian» model, itself derivative of an earlier Pythagorean belief. Athanasius described the remarkable powers of Antony in this way:

«Since [Antony] did not allow them to enter, those of his acquaintance who came to him often spent days and nights outside. They heard what sounded like clamoring mobs inside making noises, emitting pitiful sounds and crying out...At first those who were outside thought certain men were doing battle with him, and that these had gained entry by ladders, but when they stooped to peek through a hole, they saw no one, and they realized then that the adversaries were demons»²⁸.

There is nothing in this account remarkably different from what we already have seen replicated by Sulpicius and Gregory. The disciples who are outside hear but cannot see, while the saint fully discerns the situation. What is remarkable is that this construct bears a more than coincidental resemblance to a description of the Pythagorean grades or degrees of understanding. Iamblichus tells us that among the disciples of Pythagoras there were

²⁶ *Interim conloquentium murmur audimus et mox horrore quodam circumfundimur ac stupore*: Sulp. Sev. *dial.* 2,13: CSEL 1 (1866), p. 195; transl. by Hoare, *transl. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

²⁷ *Sed et plerumque fidelibus viris nocte ad cellulam clam adpropinquantibus quasi vox multi psallentii resonabat*: Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 13,1: MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, I,2, p. 266. For similar cases of singing being heard in the cell of the saint, see Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1,4, *edit. cit.*, p. 140 (Van Dam, *op. cit.*, p. 206) and *vit. patr.* 7,2, *edit. cit.*, p. 237.

²⁸ *Hii vero qui ad illum veniebant noti, quia non permittebat illis introire, aliquoties perseverabant multos dies et noctes foras constituti. Audiebant quasi multitudinem turbantium intus et voces miserabiles emittentium cum clamore...primo putabant homines esse qui litigabant cum ipso, qui positis scalis descendere possint ibi. Quando autem per cavernum adtendentes neminem viderunt, tunc recordati sunt quia daemones sunt*: Ath. v. *Anton.* 13, *edit. cit.*, pp. 94-95; *transl. cit.*, p. 41; for another example see chp. 51, *edit. cit.*, pp. 145-146; *transl. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

two groups: «Those inside and outside the veil, those who hear and see and those who hear without seeing»²⁹. While many students heard the teachings of Pythagoras, only some heard and fully comprehended their meaning — i.e., truly «saw» or understood. Just as the pagan-philosopher's ascetic method for acquiring discernment was absorbed and assimilated into the Christian ethos, so too were his methods of distinguishing, and thus highlighting, this discernment. One such method was this two-tiered model of «those who hear» and «those who hear *and* see». Witness *Act. 9,7* (the conversion of Paul), «And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one».

Another way the saint demonstrated powers of *discretio* was through the knowledge of events occurring contemporaneously at a distant location. This information was granted either by an intermediary only the saint could discern or by the divine power of telescopic sight. Again, we find the precursor of this mode of discernment in Antony's *vita* and, not surprisingly, demonstrated even earlier by the pagan philosopher-ascetic Apollonius. On the surface, it appears that this hyper-awareness was just another way for the saint to manifest his power to discern deeply. However, if one more carefully examines the context of each of the references alluded to above, it becomes clear that the hagiographers, whether consciously or not, were using this method of clairvoyance as a means to compensate for a handicap shared by their respective holy men. For, as we have seen, to possess discernment meant to live an ascetic life, being unconcerned with daily matters that would serve as distractions from the austere daily regimen. Yet, through their miraculous ability of far-sightedness, the saints were able to surmount this marginality and remain «plugged in» to the current affairs of the world, without having to engage or participate in them. For ex., due to a previous bad experience with episcopal politics³⁰, Martin lived the last sixteen years of his life «without attending a single synod and keeping away from every gathering of bishops»³¹. It was during this period of seclusion that he discerned by means of a heavenly informant what had taken place at the synod at Nîmes³². Likewise, in Gregory's account, St. Nicetus was more aware of the current contents of the fish-traps than the cook whose job it was to tend to them, even though the saint was sequestered in his cell³³. Athanasius tells us

²⁹ Τοὺς γὰρ εἶσω συνδόνος καὶ ἔξω ἀκρωμένους τοῦ Πυθαγόρου καὶ τοὺς μετὰ τοῦ ὄραν ἀκούοντας ἢ ἄνευ τοῦ ὄραν: Iamb. *v.P.* 18,89, *edit. cit.*, p. 52; *transl. cit.*, p. 40.

³⁰ For the particular circumstances of this experience, see Sulp. Sev. *dial.* 3,11-13, *edit. cit.*, pp. 208-211; *transl. cit.*, pp. 133-137.

³¹ *Sedecim postea vixit annos: nullam synodum adiit, ab omnibus episcoporum conventibus se removit*: Sulp. Sev. *dial.* 3,13, *edit. cit.*, p. 211; *transl. cit.*, p. 137.

³² For another example, see Sulp. Sev. *dial.* 2,13, *edit. cit.*, pp. 195-197; *transl. cit.*, p. 120.

³³ Greg. Tur. *vit. patr.* 17,4, *edit. cit.*, pp. 281-282. For another example, see Greg. Tur.

that Antony «saw» the timely event of the city of Nitria (the death of the monk Amun) from his cell thirteen days distant in the desert³⁴, while Philostratus reports how Apollonius «saw», as he was holding a discussion off in the woods of a park in Ephesus, the murder of Domitian in Rome³⁵. This seemingly paradoxical portrayal of the «secluded yet aware» saint had the saint passively engaged in secular affairs. Ironically, it was with the death of the saint that this engagement with the world became increasingly active — another paradox that serves to demonstrate the final form by which Frankish hagiographers would describe saintly discernment.

As Gregory duly noted, saints were especially known for their thirst for justice³⁶; St. Nicetus exclaimed «I would willingly die for justice»³⁷. Esteem for this virtue had familiar roots in Antony and Pythagoras:

«For even all the judges requested that [Antony] descend from the mountain, for it was impossible for them to come there because of the litigants who followed them... He aided the judges, advising them to value justice over everything else, and to fear God, and to realize that by the judgment with which they judged, they themselves would be judged»³⁸.

«Arrogance, self-indulgence and contempt for law often prompt injustice: Pythagoras said, therefore, that every day one should assist the law and fight against lawlessness³⁹...[He] manifested great concern for training in justice, and established a tradition of justice in words and deeds alike»⁴⁰.

glor. conf. 19: MGH. *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, I, 2, pp. 308-309, transl. by Van Dam, Liverpool 1988, pp. 33-34.

³⁴ Ath. v. Anton. 60, edit. cit., pp. 156-158; transl. cit., pp. 76-77.

³⁵ Philostr. v.A. 8,26, edit. cit., II, pp. 390-394; transl. cit., pp. 241-242.

³⁶ For a number of references and insightful commentary, see K. Mitchell, *Saints and Public Christianity in the Historiae of Gregory of Tours*, in [AA.VV.], «Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages», eds. T.F.X. Noble and J.J. Contreni, Kalamazoo 1987, pp. 77-94.

³⁷ *Libenter moriar pro iustitia*: Greg. Tur. vit. patr. 17,2, edit. cit., p. 280.

³⁸ *Quia et multi iudices rogabant eum descendere de monte quia ipsis impossibile erat introire ibi propter multitudinem quae sequebatur eos... Dabat enim eis consilium praeponere omnibus iustitiam, Dominum timere, et scire quia quali iudicio iudicaverint, tali iudicari habent*: Ath. v. Anton. 84, edit. cit., pp. 182-183; transl. cit., p. 92.

³⁹ Ἐπει δὲ καὶ ὕβρις καὶ τρυφή πολλάκις καὶ νόμων ὑπεροψία ἐπαίρουσιν εἰς ἀδικίαν. διὰ ταῦτα ὁσημέραι παρήγγελλε νόμφ βοθηεῖν καὶ ἀνομία πολεμεῖν: Iamb. v.P. 30,171, edit. cit., p. 96; transl. cit., p. 76.

⁴⁰ Πέφηνεν ἄρα διὰ πάντων τούτων μεγάλην σπουδὴν περὶ τὴν τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀσκήσιν καὶ παράδοσιν εἰς ἀνθρώπους πεποιημένος Πυθαγόρας ὡς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις: Iamb. v.P. 30,186, edit. cit., pp. 103-104; transl. cit., p. 82.

In the ready and able hands of a bishop, however, it was rather the *relics* of a saint that could assist in the pursuit and enforcement of this ideal. Many times, parties in conflict would agree to swear oaths on relics, demonstrating confidence that false testimony by a litigant would be recognized by and elicit the wrath of the discerning saint⁴¹. For Gregory, this confidence was never disappointed:

«[After swearing a false oath on the relics of St. Stephen, the feet of the perjurer] were jerked up, he was tossed into the air, and his head struck the pavement. To the surrounding crowd he seemed almost lifeless. Almost two hours later when he was thought to be clearly dying, he opened his eyes and confessed his misdeed; he admitted that he had unjustly harassed these men and unjustly proclaimed them to be guilty. In this way, by disclosing the innocent and exposing the guilty the power of the blessed Stephen was clearly apparent»⁴².

Unlike the modern concept of Justice as «blind», in the Middle Ages Justice could see⁴³. It was the special gift of the saint to see matters of justice correctly. (See fig. 1 & 2). In many of Gregory's narratives, relics — the *tactilia* and *loci* through which the dead saint continued to manifest divine power — continued to exhibit this gift, operating more often first as *oculi*. These earthly remainders of the saint acted as «receivers» as much as «transmitters» between this world and the next, whereby the saint not only could maintain a hyper-awareness of material affairs but also effect special discernment of them. It was this capability that Gregory exploited in many of his accounts, using relics as the ultimate «lie detectors» — polygraphs that were infallible and would mete out the just punishments to perjurers.

⁴¹ This role of intermediary, as one who could safely and effectively manipulate the relics of the saint, was crucial to the influence and *merita* of the bishop. See P. Brown, «Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours», in Id., *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982, pp. 239-250. For a complete discussion, which contextualizes this practice within the larger role played by bishops as peacemakers, see E. James, 'Beati pacifici': *Bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul*, in [AA.VV.], «Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West», ed. J. Bossy, Cambridge 1983, pp. 32-34.

⁴² *Statimque elevatis in sublimi pedibus, in aera excutitur ac, inliso capite in pavimento, pene exanimis circumstanti turba conspicitur. Post duarum fere horarum spatium cum ad liquidum putaretur spiritum exalare, apertis oculis crimen fatetur, se iniuste fatigasse homines vel proclamasse noxios declaravit: sicque laxatis insontibus, manifestato nocente, virtus beati perpatuit.* Greg. Tur. *glor. mart.* 33: MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, I, 2, p. 58, transl. by Van Dam, p. 53.

⁴³ While a detailed account of this distinction goes beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is a topic to which I plan to return. For an introduction, see O.R. Kissel, *Die Iustitia: Reflexionen über ein Symbol und seine Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*, München 1984, pp. 82-92.

However, the hagiographer had to be careful with this method or circumstance for illustrating *discretio*, as it lay at the interstices of «ideal» and «reality»⁴⁴. People really did come into conflict and at times really did bring their disputes before the bishop, who mediated through oath-swearing on the relics of the «knowing saint» — a veridical situation unlike the previous purely literary *formulae* for evincing saintly discernment. In other words, this mode of description brought the saint within the active realm of human experience. This interface of ideal with reality could be problematic, as readers were familiar with the complications involved in judicatory procedure, complications the hagiographer needed to account for. While the ideal professed by Gregory was a situation where justice was served wholly and decisively by the saint (through his relics)⁴⁵, the reality was less tidy. The problem lay in jurisdiction. Due to political expediency, cases often were tried in the court most advantageous to the litigants — this not always being (as the hagiographer would have liked) episcopal⁴⁶. Although secular courts in fact dealt with the majority of cases⁴⁷, Gregory nevertheless shrewdly turned this inconvenient reality to his advantage. Much like the relative use of «those who hear» to measure and emphasize the greater virtue of the saint who could both hear and see, Gregory cast the «inefficacy» of the secular courts as a foil to demonstrate the superior discernment and judgment of saintly adjudication. On one occasion, a man suspected and accused of murder «was sentenced to clear himself by oath. The dead man's relations were not satisfied with this, and they demanded that the case be brought before King Childebert's court»⁴⁸. Unfortunately, the suspect was set free after three days in the royal court due to a lack of evidence, even though «many» thought the man to be obviously guilty. The relatives had made the mistake of not confiding in the ability of the episcopal court to serve justice through

⁴⁴ See [AA.VV.], «Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society», eds. P. Wormald - D. Bullough - R. Collins, Oxford 1983.

⁴⁵ For ex., Greg. Tur. *glor. mart.* 38; 52; 57; 102; *Franc.* 8,23; *vit. patr.* 8,9; *Iul.* 19; 40.

⁴⁶ Episcopal courts were given formal legal position in 318 under Constantine: «if any person should desire him to transfer his case to the jurisdiction of the Christian law and to observe that kind of court, he shall be heard, even though the action has been instituted before the judge, and whatever may be adjudged by them shall be held as sacred»: *cod. Theod.* 1,27,1 (C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, London 1952, p. 31). See Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles...*, *cit.*, p. 100.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the role of the secular court in dispute resolution during this period, see I. Wood, *Disputes in Late Fifth- and Early Sixth-Century Gaul: Some Problems*, in [AA.VV.], «The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe», eds. W. Davies and P. Fouracre, Cambridge 1986, pp. 7-22.

⁴⁸ *Vt se insontem redderet sacramento. Sed nec hoc his adquiescentibus, placitum in regis Childeberthi praesentiam posuerunt*: Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 7,23; MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, I,1, p. 343; transl. by L. Thorpe, *History of the Franks*, London 1974, p. 406.

the saint and, as Gregory was quick to point out, ultimately paid for it with the release of the alleged murderer by the secular court.

* * *

This essay began with a short passage concerned with the diagnosis and subsequent exorcising of a demon-infested man through the power of St. Martin. While it is my hope that the several components of saintly discernment I have briefly sketched above help to clarify both what the parents of the man meant when they exclaimed that St. Martin could «reveal the cunning in these attacks» and from where this conception of discernment came, I realize that this particular vignette remains problematic. For the saint, through the medium of his relics in the church, did not immediately heal the man of his demon. Rather, his trembling was completely removed only «after he had lived a long time in this faith» — namely, in a state of fasting, prayer, and invocation. I would suggest that this situation continues and extends the role of the saint in his capacity to resolve conflict, borrowing a pattern of behaviour requisite of the other mode of dispute settlement current at this time — the *iudicium Dei*, better known to us as the Ordeal. As Peter Brown has noted, the representative of the conflict in the Ordeal was placed under a strict program of purification: «Shaved, dressed in a shirt, for three days his diet and his whole rhythm of life is that of a priest not of a layman...he is liberally doused with holy water and transformed by long prayers into a prototype of the ancient righteous man delivered in times of tribulation»⁴⁹. It was only through this ascetic purity that the person could become a conduit for the demonstration of God's discernment and final judgment. In the case involving the saint, we see a change in characters but the roles and acts remain the same: instead of a *iudicium Dei*, we have a *iudicium Sancti*; rather than two persons in dispute, we have a conflict between a man and a demon; and like those who found themselves involved in the Ordeal, the man in this predicament could only find relief — that is, favorable judgement and its consequences — from the saint by first engaging in a ritual purgation, a governing behaviour typical to the «controlled miracle» of discernment⁵⁰.

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⁴⁹ Brown, «Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change», in Id., *Society and the Holy...*, cit., p. 313.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Society and the Holy...*, cit., pp. 192-193; 307-308.



Fig. 1 - Christ as the Sun of Justice (*Sol iustitiae*) during the Last Judgment. Like the radiant eyes of Apollonius, Christ the Judge appears as one «whose eyes flame like fire» (Rev. 1,14; 2,18). Etching by Albrecht Dürer, ca. 1500.



Fig. 2 - According to Sebastian Brant, in his poem *The Ship of Fools*, a fool is one who would seek to blind Justice. Etching by Albrecht Dürer, 1494.