For why, magnificent son, do you not realize that the world is at its end? Everything is under pressure every day. We are being led to the eternal and terrifying Judge to render our accounts. What then should we think about, other than his arrival?2

Thus Gregory the Great, writing in June 597, to Andrew, a friend seeking preferment at the court in Constantinople. The “last things”, whether individual (death, judgement, heaven and hell) or universal (the Second Coming, Last Judgement, and consummation of all things), were never far from Gregory’s mind.3 Eschatological awareness weaves a matrix of stern expectation, aspiration, and motivation that undergirds Gregory’s thought-world like a steel mesh.4 Whether teaching, dispensing pastoral advice, responding to queries, ruling on papal matters, or writing to

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4 Markus (*Gregory the Great*, p. 54) notes the lack of obvious predecessors or successors for Gregory’s heightened eschatological sense among major Latin Church figures. For patristic context, especially the contrasts with Ambrose and Augustine, see Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church. A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1991), chapters 8, 10, and 12; also Hester, *Eschatology and Pain*, pp. 15–20.
intimate friends, Gregory’s conviction that all must face the Judge—soon—infused his every word and deed with urgency. Throughout his pontificate, Gregory’s focus on the End and its implications for present-day behaviour was consistent, no matter who the audience; none escaped his call for increased eschatological mindfulness. In the first month of his pontificate (September 590), Gregory admonished Justin, praetor of Sicily, to keep the End in mind, as a sure defence against temptation:  

Let no bribes draw you to injustice, and let neither threats nor friendship deflect you from the path of righteousness. Look at how brief life is, contemplate before what judge you are going to appear, and how soon, you who exercise judicial power.

Fearless in expressing the same message to both small and great, Gregory was liable to launch into motivational full-scale rehearsals of the Last Judgement whether writing fondly to friends or sternly to the emperor, fellow clerics, or aristocratic landowners. His eschatological concern could be expressed in several different registers. Writing to intimates, such as his old friend, Rusticiana patricia, and her daughter Eusebia patricia, Gregory wrote with gentle, though still urgent, concern for their well-being. In June 603, Gregory admonished Rusticiana to:

Consider all things as transitory. You would then every day consider ceaselessly with fear and tears the terrifying trial of the Judge soon to come, and you should fearfully think again about that day on which all things are to be thrown into confusion, so that you no longer fear the anger of the Judge on the day itself.

Writing to Emperor Maurice in opposition to a new law, Gregory pulled no eschatological punches:  

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6 For example, Reg. 4.44, 3.61, 3.29, 4.23; see Martyn, Letters, 1:282 n. 205.


8 Reg. 3.61, trans. Martyn, 1:281–82 (CCSL 140:210, ll. 48–59): “Requirat rogo dominus meas quis prior imperator talem legem dederit, et subtilius aestimet si debuit dari. Et considerandum ualde est quia eo iam tempore prohibitur quique relinquere saeculum, quo appropinquauerit finis ipse saeculorum. Ecce enim mora non erit, et ardente caelo, ardente terra, coruscantibus elementis, cum angelis et archangelis, cum thronis et dominionibus, cum principatibus et potestatibus tremendus iudex apparebit. Si omnia peccata dimiserit,