In keeping with the spirit of Brill’s Companion Series, the following essay introduces the major themes and scholarly discussions related to Gregory the Great’s approach to the “art” of spiritual direction, which is best represented in his Liber Regulae Pastoralis (Book of Pastoral Rule), which was the most copied and influential of his writings in the Middle Ages. Following a cursory summary of the competing ideas about spiritual direction that circulated among Christian authors prior to Gregory’s pontificate, this essay will examine the context, structure, and content of the Pastoral Rule. In doing so, I will argue that Gregory’s vision of spiritual direction was a sophisticated synthesis of multiple (previously competing) traditions about pastoral care that he generally, although not always, attempted to put into action during his tenure as bishop of Rome. The essay concludes with a brief appraisal of the text’s reception in later generations along with an analysis of the ways in which it inspired subsequent ideas about the relationship between leadership, responsibility and accountability, whether clerical or otherwise.

Pastoral Care in the Post-Constantinian World

With a few notable exceptions, both the criteria for spiritual authority and the exercise of spiritual leadership in the pre-Constantinian period were largely uniform from one Christian community to another, and are reflected in a few surviving texts, often known as “Church orders”—the

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Didascalia apostolorum offering, perhaps, the best example. These texts located authority in the person of the bishop and prescribed specific requirements for episcopal election. They also identified several episcopal responsibilities, both administrative and pastoral. The legalization of Christianity in the early 4th century, however, led to a widening of the difference between what we might distinguish as lay versus ascetic (eventually monastic) communities. The divergence in Christian practice, in turn, led to the development of distinctive patterns of spiritual guidance designed to accommodate those practices—this was true both in terms of the qualities that were understood to be necessary for spiritual leadership and in terms of the actual techniques of spiritual supervision that leaders employed for the benefit of those in their care.

Thus, we can observe that by the middle of the 4th century that the patterns of spiritual direction began to coalesce around the bifurcated pastoral needs of the “parish” and the monastery. The first focused on the lay community, was directed by an ordained clergy, and emphasized doctrinal instruction, the distribution of charity, and the performance of the sacraments. The second developed in a monastic setting, taking a more personal and interactive approach through a spiritual father/spiritual disciple model of apprenticeship that was, in many ways, modeled upon Greco-Roman traditions of philosophical discipleship and training. But the 4th century was a period of tremendous change for the Christian world and by the end of the century, the divide between monastic and lay patterns of spiritual direction had become integrated in new ways as professed ascetics began to rise to positions of episcopal authority.

It was precisely during this period of change and uncertainty that a new genre of Christian literature—the pastoral treatise—emerged to navigate the uneven waters of post-Constantinian spiritual direction. Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose of Milan, and John Chrysostom authored substantial treatises on the goals and techniques of spiritual direction. Their texts define who should and who should not receive ordination, they identify the director’s practical responsibilities, and they anticipate many of the

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3 See Demacopoulos, *Five Models*, pp. 3–16.