Despite being faced with the difficulties of a convulse sixth century Rome, Gregory managed to pay attention to one of his deepest worries, the evangelization of the *infideles*. It was usual for him to be able to argument and design a plan of action for each specific case even though it meant him changing his attitude or lowering his objectives to convert them; because that was what our Pontiff pursued, leading lost souls to God according to his own eschatological concept of the world. As a result, Gregory undertook some actions with regard to certain Christian deviations – Donatism and the Tricapitoline Schism – and other religions – Paganism and Judaism – which deserve special attention in order to be able to value the real significance of his work. Although all of these groups represent *in extenso* the religious otherness for the Pope, our contribution to this Conference has reduced the scope of the study to only one of them, the pagans.

However, who can be considered pagan? What is Paganism in the sixth century? Markus¹ warns us of the difficulty to interpret this concept from the modern historian’s point of view and disagrees with some terminological conclusions. In Gregory’s writings we find terms² like *gentilis, infidelis* or *idolorum cultor* clearly related to *paganus*, which, curiously, only appears thrice in his epistolary and always referring to slaves; it seems obvious that these expressions are not exact synonyms and that they may have hidden meanings that only a contemporary person could appreciate but, in short, they refer us to those who do not follow the Judaic religion nor the Christian. Thus, *gentiles* become *lato sensu*, real outsiders in an eminent monotheist and mainly Christian society.

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² *Paganus* is cited in Gregory the Great, Ep. VI 10, VI 29 and VIII 35 (CChrSL 140-140a, 378-9, 401-2 and 560-1).
But the problem lies in the existence of fideles whose acts make them worthy to be included in this same group, and this fact raises serious doubts about the missionary policy to be undertaken in either case, although both play a part in every priest’s ministerial duties. To conclude, the means may change but the aim remains the same: to integrate both groups in the community of believers for gentilitas is worthy of its locus misericordiae Dei, as Gregory states.

Even so, was there a canonical method to evangelize the unfaithful in the sixth century? It seems quite possible that Gregory had read *De catechizandis rudibus* by Augustine, in which pagans are divided into rudes ac simplices and liberalibus doctrinis exculti, but one may observe a considerable difference of method with the Gregorian evangelic practice which, on the contrary to the Augustinian, prefers baptism rather than instruction. Likewise, we do not document any sermon or catechetical writing addressed to heathens after those by Quodvultdeus, Peter Chrysologus or Caesarius of Arles in the fifth century and only Martin of Braga and his *De correctione rusticorum* would follow this path in the following century. Due to the differences between the times and the society of Augustine and those of Gregory, we can understand the changes occurred in pastoral care, focusing on moral contents, prioritizing proselytism, and referring to evangelization as the ultimate objective of the munus ecclesiae.

Now, we go on to refer chronologically to the actions against pagans documented and/or undertaken by Gregory obviating the frustrated attempt to evangelize the Lombards for evident reasons of hostility. We will start, then, with the initiatives carried out in the Italian islands, a zone where an especially fierce pervivence of polytheistic cults together with the scourge of war have led their ecclesiastic structures to such a critical situation that many sees are found vacant; this way, the wild rural environment as well as the negligence of local clergymen allow the continuity of pagan rites which, having often lost their significance, still maintain a close bond with the gentile past that the Church seeks to eradicate completely.

In Sicily, an area well controlled by the pontifical milieu, we notice some local potentes protecting pagani in the township of Tindarise, whose bishop, Eutichius, is warned of this in 593 by Gregory, who urges him to persecute

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them and to obtain their apostasy. Eight years later, in 601, the notarius Adrianus\textsuperscript{7} intervenes again in religious matters on behalf of the Pontiff punishing certain sorcerers as the scholasticus Paul\textsuperscript{8} would do shortly afterwards. In both examples, our Pope shall always look for State support for the actions of the Church thereby recovering the traditional concept of collaboration and combined effort between the ecclesiastic and civil authorities.

In Sardinia, the situation was even worse, and Gregory was well aware of this because he sent two papal legates there, abbot Cyriacus and bishop Felix, in order to evaluate the religious reality of this island. Their reports were obviously not very optimistic for they led to a programme of measures as described in the nine letters that constitute the ‘Sardinian file’ against heathenism composed between 594 and 600.

In the first of them, the Pope addresses all noblemen and landowners\textsuperscript{9} on the island advising them to keep every idolatrous tenant living in their properties away from the infidelitas. The two next epistles are sent to the factores about the conversion of the pagan tribe of the Barbaricini: to Zabardas,\textsuperscript{10} the dux Sardiniae who defeats them and includes the christianization of the whole tribe in the terms of surrender, and to Hospito,\textsuperscript{11} the barbarian chieftain that propitiates the transition to Catholicism among his people through his own baptism, being therefore compared to Constantine the Great in a really significant topos. Lastly, Gregory grants Cyriacus and Felix full power to direct the evangelization of the Barbaricini without any intervention from the tribal leader but with all his support.

The addressee of other four letters is Januarius, bishop of Cagliari, reproached for his lassitude in the performance of his responsibility as Sardinian metropolitan, notably slack in the application of ecclesiastic discipline; such was the case that one of his priests in his charge took up sorcery and fled to Africa forsaking his flock.\textsuperscript{12} Besides, Januarius revealed himself to be inefficient to convert the insular gentiles thus forcing Gregory to require him to be more severe when imposing the papal instructions.\textsuperscript{13} One of these redounded to the restoration of the see of Fausiana,\textsuperscript{14} whose continuity had the aim to enforce the ecclesiastic connection in the interior of Sardinia, a region where Christianism scarcely seems to be established. The fourth and last descriptive epistle\textsuperscript{15} to Januarius dates from 599. By means of this, Gregory urged him – together

\textsuperscript{7} Id., Ep. XI 33 (921).
\textsuperscript{8} Id., Ep. XIV 1 (1065-6).
\textsuperscript{9} Id., Ep. IV 23 (241-2).
\textsuperscript{10} Id., Ep. IV 25 (244).
\textsuperscript{11} Id., Ep. IV 27 (246).
\textsuperscript{12} Id., Ep. IV 24 (242-3).
\textsuperscript{13} Id., Ep. IV 26 (244-6).
\textsuperscript{14} Id., Ep. IV 29 (247-8).
\textsuperscript{15} Id., Ep. IX 205 (763-5).
with military and civil authorities – to lead necromancers and idolaters the right way using aggressive practices\(^6\) such as onerous fiscal burdens or imprisonment for the citizens and whipping and crucifixion for the slaves. According to Boesch Gajano,\(^7\) there was a flux of peasants from ecclesiastic to laic properties due of the larger tolerance shown by their owners towards some religious deviations – naturalistic cults, for instance –, and maybe it was for this reason that Gregory ordered such cruel measures.

Nevertheless, it seems that neither the ecclesiastic nor the civil authorities would do much to improve this situation and thus, as recorded in the epistle to Empress Constantina\(^8\) of 595, Gregory was forced to send a trustworthy peninsular bishop to specifically deal with this affair. In the same letter, it is shown that a Sardinian judge received bribes to allow and conceal pagan cultural practices – also to converts! – and he even offered a part of this illicit payment to the pontifical legate to keep silent about it. To confirm this continuity of heathen cults, we may recall a letter sent five years later to Spesindeus,\(^9\) praeses of Sardinia, to whom Gregory reminds him of his duty to support Victor, bishop of Fausiana, in extending the Catholic faith to the polytheistic redoubts still existent in his diocese.

Lastly, to conclude this insular route, we also find a tiny Corsica affected by pre-Christian religions as attested by bishop Peter of Aleria,\(^10\) who describes how a part of his community has returned to heathenism and once again adores sticks and stones.

It is true that polytheism – favoured by changing historical circumstances and rough orography – still existed especially in the Italian islands, but not only there did paganism survive and so Gregory would have to persecute it in Campania, at the gates of Rome, as Benedict of Nursia\(^11\) had done when he substituted a temple dedicated to Apollo next to Cassino for an oratory dedicated to Martin. With regard to Campania, the related facts occurred in Terracina, where its bishop Agnellus\(^12\) had serious problems to repress the naturalist cult – arborum cultores – carried out in his jurisdiction and must request the Pope the intervention of comes Maurus.

\(^6\) H.-D. Kahl, Die ersten Jahrhunderte (1978), 55, remarks that the terms (re)uocare and (ad)ducere refer to the infideles. See also R.A. Markus, Gregory the Great's Pagans (2001), 29, who connects these words with the conversion of Constantine.


\(^8\) Gregory the Great, Ep. V 38 (312-4).

\(^9\) Id., Ep. XI.12 (878).

\(^10\) Id., Ep. VIII 1 (513-41); see VI 22 (392).

\(^11\) Id., Dial. II 8.10-3 (SC 260, 166-70); see III 8 (282-4).

\(^12\) Id., Ep. VIII 19 (539).
Another two references to Paganism present in the Gregorian corpus place pontifical action outside the Italian limits, and beyond these cases, there is no evidence of further knowledge on the part of the see of Peter out of his range of influence: the first case happens in Francia, where we document several focuses of daemonorum cultores whose repression is entrusted to Queen Brunichild; the second one refers to the distant Kingdom of Kent, where the papal assignment of eradicating pagan beliefs falls on King Ethelbert. This well analyzed missio Britannica, backed by our Pope, offers us a couple of interesting points to be compared with the actions undertaken on Italian ground by the bishop of Rome.

The first of these points consists in the use of the Constantinian tópos regarding a tribal chieftain or a barbarian king, that is to say a very different kind of leader to the Roman ideal of princeps or imperator: if Gregory had compared Hospito, a simple dux of a small tribe, with Constantine in 594, seven years later, the Pontiff would do the same with Ethelbert, rex of Kent and also bretwald of the Saxon kingdoms. It is quite clear that neither the rank nor the power of both can be compared, but the aim of this praise remains the same: that their leadership – developed in a similar way to that of continental monarchs – facilitates the spreading of Christianity within the regna of their gentes for it may unite them to the Christiana res publica existent in good part of the ancient Romania. Indeed, apart from the aforementioned examples, we find parallelisms with the Constantine tópos applied to Germanic kings in this period: Gregory of Tours and Leander of Seville had used it with Clovis and Reccared respectively, but Gregory the Great is the first bishop – and Pope – to use it without the ‘national’ subordination which grieves on the other prelates.

The second point concerns the difference between the evangelic methods employed in Italy and in England. We have already seen the steady resolution of Gregory in Sardinia or in Campania, where the support of civil authority allowed the Pope to exercise a real coercion over the gentiles; however, even when pursuing the same aims, his attitude towards the king of Kent will be very different. In fact, two pontifical letters sent in 601 to Ethelbert and Mellito show a relevant doctrinal change: on the one hand, Gregory urges the Saxon King to persecute the cult of idols – idolorum cultum insequire – and to destroy the pagan shrines – fanorum aedificia reuertere – to accelerate the conversion of his people and to become a new Constantine before the end of time; on the other hand, the epistle sent to the leader of the second missionary

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d underlines once again the destruction of idols but insists on the preservation of heathen temples — \emph{fana idolorum minime destrui debeant} —, which, once purified and decorated, would become churches. The reason for this apparent contradiction between both missives seems clear: in the meantime, there have been changes in the papal policy towards the monarchy of Kent that have invalidated coercive methods in favour of a subtle substitution of cults.\footnote{Daniel T. Reff, \emph{Plagues, Priests, Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New} (Cambridge, 2005), 225 and especially 238.}

Gregory was well aware of the way he should adapt his arguments to different addressees in order to achieve his purpose, and the last thing he desired was to pull too much on the tight rope which led to the conversion of \emph{Britannia}.

In conclusion, we observe how the Gregorian doctrine regarding Paganism prioritizes preaching but does not exclude coercion wherever it is possible to apply, that is to say on imperial territory; and one must remember that our Pope ordered such repressive measures like the increase of fiscal burdens, physical punishments and even death penalty trying by all means at hand to attain his evangelic objective. These measures really oppose those proposals made for the lands out of the Empire, in which the \emph{auctoritas} of Rome could do nothing but subordinate to the \emph{voluntas} of the Germanic kings. And this would be the guideline of later papal missionary policies and the example on which the pastoral doctrine of the Early Middle Ages would be based in spite of the 'constructed' image of Gregory as a destroyer of idols,\footnote{Tilmann Buddenseig, Gregory the Great, Destroyer of Pagan Idols: \emph{JWI} 38 (1965) 44-65, already revealed unfair this medieval topic.} an image that hardly agrees with his actions, energetic but calm and above all temporizing.