Augustine's Preaching for a Pilgrim Church

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Abstract:

In this study I examine Augustine's sermons on pilgrimage as they illustrate his conception of the Christian life as a journey through this life on to the next. In chapter 1, I argue that these sermons were intended to move souls spiritually forward along that journey to and in Christ. Each sermon is best conceived as a signpost pointing the way forward, and forming the identity, practices, and perspectives of Augustine's listeners as pilgrims journeying to their final and ultimate home. In Chapter 2 I sketch an ecclesiological reflection on the pilgrim people evident in Augustine's sermons. In Chapter 3 I introduce prayer as a pilgrim practice that nourishes and sustains pilgrims on their journey. In Chapter 4 I consider joy as a pilgrim posture that both urges pilgrims forward to their final end in Christ, while also strengthening them on the path to Christ that is Christ. Finally, in the conclusion I discuss the contemporary significance of Augustine's preaching through selective engagement with contemporary scholarship to illuminate Augustine's distinctive theological contributions and their relevance to current discourse.

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Acknowledgements

Years ago, as a young preacher looking to punch up my work, I began searching for quotes from historical figures to include in my own weekly sermons. It wasn't long before I stopped mining for quotes and started reading for enjoyment. An ancient preacher from North Africa became a trusted guide in my own preaching and on the pilgrim way itself. That early fascination with the preaching of a 5th century bishop was the foundation for and impetus behind this project.

Thanks are due to many people upon it's completion, more than can be listed here.

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I dedicate this dissertation to Shelly, my co-traveler in life and love.

Introduction:
Our Most Dangerous Pilgrimage

"…the Word of God, which is the only food of the soul,
and that most excellent light that we must walk by, in this our most dangerous pilgrimage."
– Opening line of the 1562 preface to the *Books of Homilies*[1]

If anyone had reason to complain about the times they were living in, it was Augustine. Born into the waning years of the Roman Empire (354), he spent his early years mourning his father, avoiding his mother, chasing intellectual fads, fame, his love for love, only to discover that when he found what he was looking for, it wasn't what he was looking for. After converting to Christianity in 386, Augustine sought comfort in a life of quiet reflection, study, and community. While visiting Hippo, the gifted theologian was forced into the priesthood and soon thereafter, forced into preaching. He became a bishop some 5 years later. Later, in the middle of his ecclesiastical career, now a respected theologian and outspoken leader of the Church, having earned the renown he had sought when young but not in a way he would have imagined, Augustine witnessed the sack of Rome by the Visigoths (410). He found himself preaching to a crumbling empire for the next 20 years when, as his own death was nearing, Hippo itself was stormed by the Vandal army.

In Sermon 346C, likely preached around the sack of Rome, Augustine said, "So we really mustn't grumble, brothers and sisters…What unusual horror is the human race enduring now, that our ancestors didn't have to endure?" Encouraging a wider perspective on time and the life of faith, he continued, "You see, the times in the past you think were good, were only good for the simple reason that they weren't your times." [2]

Far from merely encouraging a thoughtful perspective on "the times," however, Augustine situated this perspective within a larger theological framework on time itself. Instead of hoping for good days in this life, "one day without end is better. So let us fix our desires on something like that."[3] The one day he refers to is shorthand for the eternal life that awaits the Christian, but to

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[1] Gerald Bray, ed., *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 5.
[2]Augustine, *Sermon 346C.1.* Edmund Hill, trans. *Sermons 341-400 on the Saints.* Vol. 10 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century.* Part III. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992.
[3] Augustine, *Sermon 346C.2.*

arrive at the "one day," a Christian must pass through many days, often turbulent ones. In the same sermon he says, "So let us place ourselves in the wayside hotel of this life, like travelers who are going to pass on, not like owners who are going to stay."[4] This passing through many days to get to the one day defines Augustine's conception of the Christian life as one of pilgrimage.

Augustine uses the Latin *stabulum* in Sermon 80[5], which translator Edmund Hill renders as "wayside hotel," noting that "The exact modern equivalent of Augustine's *stabulum* would be the motel. But I could hardly put this in the text, as it inescapably connotes travel by motor car which is worlds away from the laborious business of traveling in Augustine's time."[6] The more common usage of the term is a stall or shelter for animals, from which the English word "stable" takes its origin. Significantly, this was also the word the Vulgate uses for the birthplace of Christ, where Mary and Joseph took refuge in Bethlehem. For our purposes, it also illustrates the goal of each sermon of Augustine. Travelers are not meant to stay permanently in an inn, wayside hotel, or motel. A traveler is, by definition, not stable or static, but mobile, on the move. I argue that each sermon of Augustine is intended to move souls spiritually forward along that journey to and in Christ.

This study examines Augustine's sermons through the lens of pilgrimage as they illustrate his conception of the Christian life as a journey through temporal existence toward eternal communion with God. It argues that these sermons were intentionally crafted to move souls spiritually forward along that journey to and in Christ, functioning as both spiritual formation and practical guidance for the pilgrim way. Reading a selection of sermons through this interpretive framework reveals that each sermon is to be conceived as a signpost pointing the way forward on the journey toward the heavenly city. These sermons systematically form the identity (ecclesiology), practices (prayer), and perspective (joy) of Augustine's listeners as pilgrims journeying to their ultimate home in God.

The methodology employed in this investigation centers on close rhetorical and theological analysis of Augustine's sermonic corpus, with particular attention to recurring pilgrimage imagery, themes of movement and transformation, and the pedagogical strategies Augustine employs to form pilgrim identity in his congregations. Rather than treating the sermons as isolated theological

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[4] Augustine, *Sermon 346C.2.*

[5] Augustine, Sermon 80.7, from Edmund Hill, trans. *Sermons 51-94 on the New Testament*. Vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 2009. I will be utilizing the English translations of Augustine's works from New City Press throughout this examination unless stated otherwise.

[6] From Hill's footnote 11, where he continues, "A fascinating account of the details of travel in the ancient world, and of Augustine's own reluctant experience of it, is given in *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* by O. Perler and J.-L. Maier (Paris, 1969)."

treatises, this study approaches them as liturgical events embedded within the broader context of Christian formation, recognizing their function within the rhythm of ecclesiastical life in relation to the eschatological horizon of Christian hope. This study engages relevant secondary literature on Augustine while acknowledging the pronounced scholarly neglect of his homiletical corpus relative to his systematic theological treatises. This disparity in academic attention extends particularly to the pilgrim motif, which remains significantly understudied despite its central importance to Augustine's theological framework. Although recent scholarship has begun to address these lacunae, substantial gaps persist in our understanding of both Augustine's sermonic theology and the foundational role of the pilgrim motif in his thought.

As we will explore, Augustine's primary conception of the church is as pilgrim people, "wayfarers…tending toward our homeland."[7] In Chapter 1 I examine Augustine's stated perspective on and goals for preaching as found in his manual for preachers, *On Christian Doctrine*. I argue that Augustine's sermons constitute a sophisticated theological pedagogy designed to form Christian pilgrims capable of recognizing their true identity and vocation. Specifically, I contend that Augustine deliberately crafted his sermons to function as signposts on the pilgrim road, systematically forming the identity, practices, and perspective of his listeners as travelers journeying toward their ultimate home in God. Reading Augustine's sermonic corpus through this interpretive lens reveals that each sermon operates within a comprehensive framework of spiritual formation that moves beyond mere doctrinal instruction to move souls along the eschatological journey.

In chapter 2 I explore Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology. Looking broadly at his sermons, I demonstrate this serves as the fundamental hermeneutical framework through which he moves his listeners to view themselves as the noble caravan of pilgrims - the Body of Christ journeying corporately through this life toward the next. This study argues that the pilgrim motif deserves pride of place in understanding Augustine's ecclesiology as illustrated in these sermons especially, not merely as one rhetorical device among others, but as the organizing principle that provides coherence to his otherwise dispersed ecclesiological reflections. The chapter concludes with a close reading of key sermons that illustrate Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology. I examine this ecclesiology through the Mary and Martha motif from sermons 255, as well as 103 and 104. Two additional sermons, Exposition of Psalm 41 [42] and Exposition of Psalm 136 [137], illustrate Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology as the "noble caravan of pilgrims." To properly understand themselves as the

[7] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 125.2

Church, his listeners need to know both where and when they are, as well as where they are heading. This temporal-spatial orientation proves fundamental to Augustine's ecclesiological vision. The pilgrim motif provides both the theological framework for understanding the church's ontological status and the pastoral methodology for forming congregational identity.

In chapter 3 I explore prayer as the native tongue of a pilgrim people and the supreme practice to form the pilgrim church. Augustine's understanding of prayer as pilgrim speech represents a mature synthesis of his theological insights into the nature of Christian existence, the person and work of Christ, and the eschatological orientation of the Church. By situating prayer within the framework of pilgrimage—the journey from time to eternity, from mortality to immortality, from earth to heaven—Augustine illuminates both the necessity and the nature of Christian prayer in ways that address perennial questions while remaining sensitive to the particular challenges of his historical context. The theological sophistication of Augustine's approach lies in his ability to hold together apparent tensions without resolving them prematurely. The pilgrim prays from within time while oriented toward eternity, from within individual need while participating in corporate identity, and from within human limitation while sharing divine relationship. These tensions prove theologically productive rather than problematic, generating the reciprocal dynamics that characterize authentic spiritual growth. Chapter 3 concludes with a close reading of two sermons on the psalms: Exposition of Psalm 85 [86] and Exposition of Psalm 37 [38].

Chapter 4 focuses on the pilgrim perspective of joy. The promise of reward, combined with the hope of arriving at home, gives the pilgrim traveler joy along the way. This theological integration of present joy and eschatological fulfillment reveals Augustine not as a dour pessimist fixated on human depravity, but as a pastor-theologian keen to move the souls of his congregation. Augustine considered authentic Christian joy—rooted in union with Christ and sustained by hope in God's promises—provides both the foundation and the motivation for faithful Christian living. His sermons demonstrate that joy, properly understood within the pilgrim framework, offers believers both present consolation and future expectation, making the arduous journey toward the *civitas Dei* not merely endurable but joyful. When viewed through the lens of Augustine's consistent homiletical practice, joy emerges not as theological afterthought but as central to his understanding of how souls are moved forward along the pilgrim path toward their ultimate destination in God. Chapter 4 concludes with a close reading of Augustine's Exposition of Psalms 83 [84] and 123 [124].

We will conclude this study with a look at how Augustine's conception of pilgrimage can be of practical and theological benefit for the pilgrim Christian church today as it navigates its own

"interesting times." We will compare Augustine's pilgrimage framework with other ecclesiastical responses to troubled times and find in the ancient bishop a rich resource for our own. Augustine's pastoral and theological response to troubled times is to form an identity (pilgrims), that encourages a practice (prayer), while enjoining a posture (joy) in order to move weary travelers one step closer to their destination. The result is a soul on the move, wayfaring yet stable provided it travels in, with, and through Christ. "Love moves a thing in the direction toward which it tends."[8]

[8] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 9.15.

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Preaching To Move Pilgrims

A series of frescoes adorn the walls of the church of Saint Augustine in San Gimignano, Tuscany. Painted by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497), these frescoes depict stories and legends from Augustine's life appropriate to the church that bears his name.[9] The twelfth fresco in the series portrays what had become, by the fifteenth century, an apparently well-known story of Augustine. According to the legend, Augustine encounters a boy while walking along the seashore during a period when he was struggling to comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity sufficiently to complete his masterwork, *On the Trinity*.[10] The boy had excavated a hole in the sand and was using a small shell to transport water from the sea into the hole, one shell scoop at a time. When Augustine paused to inquire what the child sought to accomplish, the boy replied, "I'm putting the sea into this hole." Incredulous, Augustine responded, "My boy, that is impossible. The hole is not big enough to contain the entire sea." The boy then set down his shell, looked up at the bishop, and declared, "It is no more impossible than what you are trying to do—comprehend the immensity of the mystery of the Holy Trinity with your small intelligence." Taken aback, Augustine turned away in bewilderment. When he looked back toward the boy, the child had disappeared. The lesson, whether delivered by an angel or an appearance of the Christ child, was clear: the human mind could no better comprehend the depths of the Trinity than one could empty the sea into a small hole, one scoop at a time.

The seashell appears in other Augustinian iconography, including on the coat of arms of Pope Benedict XVI.[11] By the ninth century, due largely to its association with St. James and his supposed burial site in Compostela, the shell had become a symbol of baptismal rebirth, transformation and renewal, as well as the journey not merely to Santiago de Compostela, but the pilgrimage through this life to the next.[12] The shell served as identification for pilgrims, who wore it on their clothing or carried it to signal their pilgrim status, while others received a shell upon

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[9] For detailed analysis of the San Gimignano frescoes, see Diane Cole Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 187-203.

[10] The legend appears to be a later medieval development, not found in Augustine's own writings or early biographers. See Frederick van Fleteren, "Augustine's Theory of Divine Illumination and the Italian Artists," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 115-130.

[11] See Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xvi-xviii.

[12] For the history of the shell as pilgrim symbol, see Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 171-185.

completing their journey to the shrine. Thus the shell had become, well before the fresco in San Gimignano and its association with Augustine, a symbol of both the mystery of God's fullness and the pilgrim journey from the waters of baptism to their source in the vast sea of God's love.

As Augustine contemplated the immense task of communicating the mysteries of God—not merely in his treatises like *On the Trinity*, but through the regular, often daily rhythm of preaching to his congregation in Hippo—he could be forgiven for turning away from the task in bewilderment. Instead, however, cognizant of the impossibility that lay before him, he sought, one sermon at a time, to scoop water from the sea of God's mystery into the hole that was the basilica at Hippo. This chapter examines Augustine's manual for preachers, *On Christian Doctrine*, and his conception of the pilgrim motif within his overall understanding of the task of preaching. It serves as a preview for the investigation that proceeds in the subsequent chapters.

This investigation proceeds through several interconnected movements. First, it establishes the theological foundations of Augustine's understanding of pilgrimage, drawing particularly on *On Christian Doctrine*[13] and key passages from select sermons that articulate his vision of the Christian life as fundamentally characterized by movement toward God. Second, it examines the rhetorical strategies Augustine employs in his sermons to cultivate pilgrim consciousness, analyzing how he uses biblical typology, allegorical interpretation, and liturgical context to form his congregation's understanding of their identity and vocation. Third, it provides detailed analysis of selected sermons that explicitly develop pilgrimage themes, demonstrating how Augustine consistently returns to the motif of journey, exile, and homecoming as organizing principles for Christian existence. Finally, it synthesizes these findings to argue that Augustine's homiletical practice represents a sophisticated theological pedagogy designed to form Christians capable of recognizing their true identity as pilgrims, living accordingly in the present age while maintaining hope for the age to come.

The Movement of Souls: Augustine's Homiletical Purpose

Augustine employs the evocative and dynamic term "to move" (*movere*) as the ultimate goal of his sermons.[14] A sermon's purpose transcends mere teaching, scriptural exposition, or even explanation of complex theological doctrines—it seeks to move the hearts, minds, and souls of God's people

[13] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr., Library of Christian Classics (New City Press, 1958).
[14] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.12.27.

along the path to God that is Christ. The sermons function as exercises in orienting believers and not-yet-believers into God's redemptive story, constituting what Adam Ployd describes as "the training of souls" for the path they are already traversing and that still lies ahead.[15] Ployd employs this language of "soul training" to identify the primary goal of Augustine's sermons as "cultivating knowledge and love in his audience as a way to train and rehabilitate their minds and desires."[16] This training specifically targets "how we advance in knowledge of God through the reformation of our desire."[17] Similarly, Ployd observes, "in his homiletic practice, Augustine does not simply teach the truths of Christian scripture and belief. He trains his audience to pursue those truths themselves."[18]

This training of souls, as we will see, is specifically oriented toward the pilgrim journey. Augustine is self-consciously training *pilgrim* souls. The cultivation of knowledge, the awareness of love, and the rehabilitation of desire are all in service to and operate within a pilgrim motif. Indeed, the pilgrim journey, beginning in the baptismal font and ending bathed in the sea of God's love, finds in Augustine both fellow traveler and travel guide. I contend that for Augustine, his sermons function best when understood as markers on the pilgrim road to the glassy sea and the mystery of God. Each sermon served as a signpost pointing the way.

The Liturgical and Rhetorical Context of Augustinian Preaching

Understanding both the context of a sermon and what Augustine essentially assumed a sermon to be proves crucial for proper interpretation. A sermon constituted a genre distinct from his treatises in both form and function.[19] The immediate context of the sermons involved public speeches, primarily in the basilica at Hippo, but also frequently in Carthage and elsewhere. They were delivered within the broader liturgical setting of worship services, either in daily prayer or eucharistic celebrations. Consequently, the sermonic context exists within both the liturgical calendar and particular worship services. As Ployd observes, one must recognize that "the sermons are not individual, isolated texts but the record of a long discourse that Augustine conducts with his

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[15] Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.
[16] Ployd, 15.
[17] Ployd, 18.
[18] Ployd, 22.
[19] For genre distinctions in Augustine's corpus, see Karla Pollmann, "Augustine's Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline?" in *Augustine and the Disciplines*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 206-231.

audience."[20] Michael Glowasky, noting the significance of the liturgical setting, recognizes that this situates the sermons apart from Augustine's treatises in both form and intended reception:

> They must be placed in a wider context as well, including the liturgy being celebrated on that particular day, but also within the context of the liturgical season and year. In other words, they are embedded in the ebb and flow of Christian life. Each sermon builds, to a greater or lesser degree, on previous sermons and prepares the audience for future sermons. The liturgical context and consistency of the audience provides a certain continuity and sense of progression to Augustine's preaching, which further distinguishes the sermon from most other oratorical genres.[21]

A sermon, then, most succinctly stated, constituted a treatise on Scripture within the context of worship. That a sermon is primarily on and about Scripture would require no explanation for Augustine.[22] For a discourse to qualify as a sermon, Scripture must serve as its primary source. Anything else might constitute a fine speech, perhaps even with God as the subject, but unless it finds its principal origin in Scripture, it cannot be considered a sermon.[23] Similarly, a sermon must be delivered. "The audience, and their spiritual maturation in particular, is central for Augustine's understanding of his role as a preacher," as Glowasky notes.[24] Without an audience—that is, a congregation to listen—a sermon for Augustine cannot truly exist, since, as he demonstrates in *On Christian Doctrine*, the interplay between congregation and preacher remains integral to his practice and perspective on preaching itself. To better grasp how Augustine conceived his preaching task, we begin with an examination of Augustine as preacher, then proceed to his manual for preachers, *On Christian Doctrine*.

Augustine the Preacher: Formation and Practice

While Augustine's conversion story receives memorable treatment in the *Confessions*, and his pressured appointment to the priesthood in 391 appears in various letters and accounts, his

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[20] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church*, 25.
[21] Michael Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture in Augustine's Homiletic Strategy: Tracing the Narrative of Christian Maturation* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 18.
[22] Augustine begins *On Christian Doctrine* explicitly, "There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood." I.1. Augustine broke Teaching Christianity into two parts, Books I-III and Book IV, as he describes, "Let us first discuss the way of discovery, and after that the way of putting our discoveries across." I.1.I
[23] Augustine describes the "folly of preaching" (1.12.12) as well as regular references to "the gospel," by which he summarizes "Christ has risen again, and the preaching of those who proclaimed this." (2.31.49).
[24] Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture*, 12.

appointment to preaching receives considerably less attention.[25] Hildegund Müller suggests that a possible primary reason for Augustine's priestly appointment may have been his rhetorical skill, deployed to combat the Donatist heresy that had taken hold throughout much of North Africa.[26] This could also explain why Augustine received permission to preach while only a priest, a task normally reserved exclusively for bishops. Augustine himself recounts a time when, while still only a priest, he preached before all the assembled bishops of the African province who had convened for a council in Hippo.[27]

Still feeling the weight of his task, Augustine requested time to read and study the Scriptures from his bishop upon his ordination. He was granted this leave, and when he returned he possessed confidence in his scriptural understanding, though not yet sufficient confidence to feel adequate to the preaching task. Some five years later he would write the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine*, essentially a manual for preachers.[28] The first three books, however, concerned understanding Scripture, laying out Augustine's hermeneutic. Only thirty years later, after delivering thousands of sermons, did he feel comfortable enough to complete *On Christian Doctrine* and write Book IV, which served as his practical manual for preaching.[29]

The Scope of Augustine's Homiletical Output

Augustine's sermonic output proved impressive. Once he became bishop, Augustine preached multiple times per week. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan estimates at least four sermons per week, while others remain uncommitted to specific numbers.[30] His preaching duties intensified during high liturgical seasons. He preached daily during Lent and Eastertide, and twice daily during Holy Week. When Augustine visited other congregations, notably in Carthage but elsewhere as well, he received no respite from preaching but was often pressed into service at those locations. He even complained in one sermon that the room was full of bishops yet he was chosen to preach, though he was apparently hoping for the opportunity to be a listener for once.[31] Augustine would preach roughly

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[25] For Augustine's conversion, see *Confessions* 8; for his ordination, see *Epistula* 21.
[26] Hildegund Müller, *Preacher: Augustine and His Congregation* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) 156-158.
[27] Augustine, *Epistula* 21.3.
[28] For the dating of *On Christian Doctrine*, see Edmund Hill's introduction in WSA I/11, 15-18.
[29] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, prologue 7.
[30] Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, "The Transforming Sermon." PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2009, 44-45.
[31] Augustine, *Sermon* 94.1.

250 sermons per year, placing his total sermonic output between 5,000 and 8,000 sermons, depending on assumptions about when he ceased preaching and the regularity of his later career.[32]

Augustine frequently refers in his sermons to preaching as a duty to his congregation, one he discharges faithfully, if laboriously, given the toll on his health and time.[33] Given the immense obligations his episcopal duties required, the fact that he preached with such regularity speaks to the importance he assigned the task. Augustine considered preaching one of his primary, if not *the* primary, episcopal duties. While only approximately 800 of his sermons survive, this nonetheless makes them by far the largest group of writings we possess from Augustine, not to mention the largest collection of sermons from the patristic period.[34] Yet while this collection remains Augustine's largest surviving corpus, the sermons remain, as Müller notes, the "most elusive of Augustine's chosen literary forms, one that is at the same time deceptively familiar and hard to appreciate."[35] Still, Augustine referred to the priestly role as "dispensing the word and the sacrament" as well as "the steward of the gospel word and sacrament," indicating his self-understanding of ministry centered on sacramental administration and scriptural exposition.[36] These are not entirely separate tasks, however. While distinct, for Augustine there was one Word dispensed both in preaching and in the sacraments.

The Formative Function of Preaching

For Augustine, the sermon constituted one of his primary tools in forming his congregation for their pilgrimage to God. The congregation's role as listeners corresponded to his role as preacher in that they together formed the necessary components for formation to occur. As John Cavadini observes, "a close reading of the homilies reveals that *fides quaerens intellectum* is as much a homiletic principle in Augustine as it is a theological principle."[37] The congregation must believe in order to understand, as

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[32] For estimates of Augustine's sermonic output, see Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin* (Steenbrugis: In Abbatia Sancti Petri, 1976), 1-15.
[33] Augustine, *Sermon* 339.4.
[34] See Eligius Dekkers and John Fraipont, eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 3 vols., CCSL 38-40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956).
[35] Müller, *Preacher*, 145.
[36] Augustine, *Sermon* 46.2.
[37] John C. Cavadini, "The Sweetness of the Word: Salvation and Rhetoric in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*," in *On Christian Doctrine: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 164.

Augustine regularly reminds them, and each sermon provides an opportunity to practice both belief and understanding. Cavadini continues:

> The sermons consistently present faith as the *sine qua non* for understanding, but, even more importantly, they style the posture of the hearers as one of inquiry or seeking. Not everyone may understand at present, but the sermons direct everyone's faith, preacher as well as hearers, toward understanding. This occurs eschatologically, to be sure, but also in the present, in the time that the sermon is delivered and over the long term of attendance at the school of divine scripture.[38]

The eschatological framework Cavadini notes corresponds to the pilgrim journey through this life to the next, from faith to sight.

On Christian Doctrine: The Preacher's Manual

After spending time studying, learning, and memorizing Scripture, Augustine composed his manual for preachers on how they too should approach the Bible. Müller suggests that the first three chapters of *On Christian Doctrine* may have been written as notes to remind Augustine himself of his hermeneutical principles as much as to assist anyone else, but whatever his intent, *On Christian Doctrine* became a massively influential text.[39] Boyd-Macmillan suggests it is one of the most studied texts in the entire Augustinian corpus.[40] Similarly, R. A. Markus writes:

> St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* was perhaps the most significant source for the development of doctrinal preaching in the West... As the number of people engaged in doctrinal preaching grew, the fourth book of *On Christian Doctrine* became the foundational preaching manual for the priests, monks, mendicants, and humanists who had taken on the role of assisting the bishops in their mission.[41]

The Hermeneutical Foundation (Books I-III)

Augustine begins *On Christian Doctrine* by writing three books on approaching Scripture. The first three books concerned what was in Scripture itself, or at least, guiding hermeneutical principles for reading and understanding it. They were intended as a "way to discover what needs to be

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[38] Cavadini, "Sweetness of the Word," 165.
[39] Müller, *Preacher*, 167.
[40] Boyd-Macmillan, "Transforming Sermon," 45.
[41] R. A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," *Phronesis* 2 (1957): 60.

understood" in order to preach.[42] The fourth book, written thirty years later, was intended to teach preachers how to communicate what they had learned. While it might seem that for our purposes we could proceed directly to the fourth book, understanding Augustine's guiding principles for Scripture proves necessary before appreciating how to communicate those principles in sermonic form. We follow Augustine's lead, as he opened *On Christian Doctrine*, "Let us first discuss the way of discovery, and after that the way of putting our discoveries across."[43]

Boyd-MacMillan identifies "three key prerequisites Augustine sets out at the beginning of the work that enable the reader—the preacher—to locate themselves."[44] Augustine begins his work with a crucial distinction between things (*res*) and signs (*signa*). A sign always points to a thing, whereas a thing exists in itself. In other words, a sign signifies what a thing already is. As Rowan Williams notes, "To know the difference between *res* and *signum* is, for the Christian believer, to know the difference of God, and so to be equipped for life in God's image, the unending expansion of love."[45] The second key prerequisite involves understanding that human beings cannot currently know things without signs. Our knowledge depends on signs signifying to us the thing that remains obscure without the sign. Finally, there is the enjoyment-use distinction (*frui-uti*) in which Augustine notes the distinction between things that are to be used and things that are to be enjoyed. Only when one understands and implements this distinction can life truly be lived happily, going with the grain of God's creation. For Augustine, God is to be loved and thus enjoyed for his own sake, whereas things are to be used to enable and further that love and enjoyment. Thus God alone is the pure thing, and consequently God alone is to be enjoyed for his own sake. These distinctions prove key to righteous living, as Williams observes: "Only when, by the grace of Christ, we know that we live entirely in a world of signs are we set free for the restlessness that is our destiny as rational creatures."[46]

The Pilgrimage Framework

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[42] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.1.1.
[43] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.1.1.
[44] Boyd-Macmillan, "Transforming Sermon," 78.
[45] Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 1989): 141.
[46] Williams, 142.

The objective of this hermeneutic, especially as it relates to preaching, is identified by Boyd-MacMillan as follows: "Enjoyment is the key goal of understanding and preaching."[47] But even this serves Augustine's larger framework of pilgrimage. He concludes chapter 4 with what appears to be a simple explanatory metaphor but which actually provides the crucial interpretive framework for understanding both the *On Christian Doctrine* and Augustine's comprehensive approach to biblical hermeneutics and sermonic practice. He begins: "Supposing then we were exiles in a foreign land, and could only live happily in our own country, and that being unhappy in exile we longed to put an end to our unhappiness and to return to our own country..."[48] This framework of exile and estrangement, balanced by the journey toward home and reconciliation, provides the key to unlock the purpose and perspective of Augustine's sermons. "If we wish to return to our home country, where alone we can be truly happy, we have to use this world, not enjoy it, so that we may behold the invisible things of God, brought to our knowledge through the things that have been made (Rom 1:20); that is, so that we may proceed from temporal and bodily things to grasp those that are eternal and spiritual."[49] As Boyd-Macmillan demonstrates,

> There is only one way to be happy, and that is to make use of certain things that enable us to return home. But there are two ways to be unhappy. First, the way of forgetfulness, where we can forget our need to return to our home country, and second, the way of confusion, where we get so caught up in enjoyment of things that are conveying us back to our home country that we lose interest in arriving.[50]

Thus, Augustine counsels future preachers to situate their understanding of Scripture and consequently their preaching within the larger context of pilgrimage—of exile and return, of journey and arrival.

Christological Hermeneutics

Embedded within this larger pilgrimage framework is a distinctly allegorical and consequently Christological focus in the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine* and thus in Augustine's hermeneutics and sermons. Scripture serves as the ultimate signpost pointing the way home, but to arrive, the preacher must understand the way there. Simply put, Christ is that way. Thus an

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[47] Boyd-Macmillan, "Transforming Sermon," 89.
[48] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4.4.
[49] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4.4.
[50] Boyd-MacMillan, "Transforming Sermon," 91.

Augustinian approach to Scripture involves not merely finding the signs, but discerning that the signs point to Christ, and that Christ is the way. As Augustine memorably preached, "we travel to him... through him... in him."[51]

While more could be said about Augustine's appropriation of and approach to Scripture generally, it is important to recognize that in *On Christian Doctrine* the aim is educating preachers on how to approach the text.[52] Rather than a simple manual with instructions for the average reader of the Bible—which, of course, no such "average" reader existed in the late fourth century due to literacy rates and educational diversity—Augustine's goal is training preachers first on how to understand Scripture's larger framework and then to teach that to others. The framework is intended not generically, but specifically in service of preaching.

Thus in Book III Augustine describes at length a figural or allegorical approach to Scripture. While, as James O'Donnell notes, this framework was "never seriously in disrepute in the Latin West," it nonetheless remains the case that, as Müller observes, the preaching scene in North Africa at the time appeared bleak.[53] Augustine may have been pressed into service as a preacher both because quality preaching was necessary in North Africa, and because it was lacking. Augustine turned out to be both practitioner and teacher of an allegorical approach.

Allegory, as Jason Byassee notes, "is meant to reorient the way we see."[54] What Augustine wants future preachers to see is Christ—Christ hidden yet lurking throughout the Old Testament, and Christ revealed on every page of the New Testament. Michael Cameron notes this development in Augustine's thought and preaching, which becomes the hermeneutical key to unlock each passage he encountered.[55] For now, however, it is important to show that Augustine's lengthy discussions in *On Christian Doctrine* about signs and things, about that which is to be used and that which is to be enjoyed, serve the purpose of properly preaching the mysteries contained in the Scriptures of Christ and his Church. As Byassee notes:

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[51] Augustine, *Sermon* 123.3.

[52] For comprehensive treatment, see Karla Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, On Christian Doctrine* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1996).

[53] James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 234; Müller, "Preacher," 158.

[54] Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 89.

[55] Michael Cameron, *Augustine's Construction of Figurative Exegesis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996), 156-189.

> Scripture is integral to the process of the church's growth from *scientia* to *sapientia*, from Christ as way to Christ as goal. For it is that which properly funds the human will to continue the pilgrimage of people from Christ's human to his divine nature, and the unending diversity of images in the Psalter are all part of the providential economy by which his flock can grow from one to the other.[56]

Preaching must situate Scripture as the narrative of God's redemptive history such that one finds Christ hidden in plain sight on every page. Once found, he can be preached. Augustine turns his attention to that task in Book IV.

Book IV: The Art of Sacred Rhetoric

Whereas the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine* explicitly concerned Scripture and how to approach it, the final book addresses how to preach it. Largely considered a "manual for preachers," Book IV receives the most attention from scholars.[57] Written thirty years after the first three books and after thousands of sermons had been delivered, Augustine provides his most succinct and direct advice to preachers. He begins with a caveat, alerting hopeful readers that if they seek a lengthy exposition on rhetoric from a former master, they will be sorely disappointed. They can attend to the relevant classical texts as they see fit. Admittedly, however, Augustine will not leave them entirely unsatisfied.

Before speaking directly of rhetoric and its uses, Augustine begins with a working definition of the goal of preaching:

> The interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, therefore, the defender of right faith and the hammer of error, has the duty of both teaching what is good and unteaching what is bad; and in this task of speaking it is his duty to win over the hostile, to stir up the slack, to point out to the ignorant what is at stake and what they ought to be looking for.[58]

Augustine will elaborate on this throughout Book IV (and in various sermons through multiple images and metaphors) but here we receive an early summary of his goals. Note, first, that these are always directed squarely at his listeners—a sermon is nothing without a congregation, so preaching always serves the listeners. Second, Augustine notes the dual function—defender of right faith and hammer of error, teacher of the good, dismantler of the bad.

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[56] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 92.
[57] For Book IV's influence, see James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 47-71.
[58] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.4.6.

Augustine next addresses rhetoric itself. While generally skeptical of rhetoric, perhaps with a backward glance at his former, pre-conversion self, Augustine nonetheless provides a defense at the beginning of Book IV. "Would anyone dare to maintain that truth should stand there, without any weapons in the hands of its defenders, against falsehood... Could anyone be so silly as to suppose such a thing?"[59] In short, why should the devil have all the good music? More to the point, however, is Augustine's notion of truth as emanating from God, and if rhetoric can aid truth, then it logically proceeds from and returns to God. Still, Augustine emphasizes that rhetoric alone can lead people astray—indeed he speaks from experience. Before launching fully into appreciation for the art of rhetoric, he quotes Cicero on its dangers: "Wisdom without eloquence is of little use to society, while eloquence without wisdom is frequently extremely prejudicial to it, never of any use."[60] Wisdom, like truth, finds its source and summit in Christ, so though Cicero did not intend it, Augustine can find biblical warrant for his aims. Still, rhetoric is a thing to be used, not enjoyed in itself, thus the preacher is duly warned that flowery language serving only to inflate the preacher's ego constitutes a trap laid by the deceiver, not the path to Truth.

The Threefold Purpose of Preaching

Having quoted Cicero on the dangers of rhetoric, Augustine can now quote him more approvingly in advance of his own goals. Augustine will adopt the traditional purposes of rhetoric—to teach, to delight, and to sway—and employ them in service of gospel proclamation. As Cicero writes in his *Orator*, which Augustine quotes directly: "Teaching your audience is a matter of necessity; delighting them a matter of being agreeable; swaying them a matter of victory."[61] Augustine will expound each of the three in turn, then weave them together in a tapestry of sermonic instruction. Augustine notes that preaching will share the same goals of rhetoric, but oriented to a different end. While the goal of both is to teach, to delight, and to sway (or move), the ultimate aim of preaching is oriented toward God. These three goals correspond to three styles of speaking—the plain or subdued, the moderate, and the grand. As Augustine elucidates these three objectives and three delivery methods, it becomes clear that they represent points on a continuum rather than hard and fast categories with

[59] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.2.3.
[60] Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.1.1, quoted in Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.5.7.
[61] Cicero, *Orator* 69, quoted in Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.12.27.

clearly delineated lines. Both the objectives and techniques blend and bleed into one another, at times distinct, at other times difficult to distinguish.

Teaching (Docere)

Teaching appears the most obviously straightforward of the three, and any cursory examination of the sermons themselves shows this to be a primary goal of Augustine's preaching. Augustine often proceeds through passages verse by verse, explaining words as he goes, with the goal clearly being instruction. Beyond this, however, one must teach because "teaching is a matter of necessity. People, after all, are able both to act and not to act upon what they know; who though would ever say that they should act upon what they do not know?"[62] How can a Christian preacher expect anything of a congregation if they are not first taught what they are ignorant of and what they need to know as a result? While it is possible that some people may be moved to transformation by simple and direct instruction of truth and refutation of falsehood, most people, Augustine recognizes, require more. Just as simple food, modestly spiced, may nourish the body but leave the eater uninspired, so simple teaching may be technically true but ultimately boring. Teaching is best accomplished in a direct manner, simple and unadorned. William Harmless notes: "If one surveys Augustine's sermons, one finds that this subdued style was his preference, and he used it especially to unfurl the riddles of Scripture."[63] Since the bulk of his sermons involve direct teaching, they tend to be free of embellishment. This benefits the preacher as well, for as Augustine notes, "it is easier to endure the plain style alone, for any length of time, than the grand manner alone."[64]

Delighting (Delectare)

The second feature of rhetoric is to delight. Augustine recognized that while some people benefit from simple and direct teaching alone, most require more spice to their teaching in the same way they require spice to their food. Many people are "fussy and fastidious" and require "pickles and spices" on top of truth to make it, if not more palatable, then at least more enjoyable.[65] A spoonful

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[62] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.9.23.
[63] William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 156.
[64] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.22.51.
[65] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.11.26.

of sugar helps the medicine go down, and an eloquent orator ought to know when to deploy the sugar. Therefore, just as a good meal appeals to the tongue, so a good sermon should be delightful, or tasty, to the spiritual and physical palate. Delight in rhetoric should be carefully and studiously deployed not merely for its own ornamental sake, but to hold the congregation's attention and deliver the required message. A moderate style of speaking adds spice to the task by employing a wide range of classical rhetorical devices and figures. The goal is to communicate even what people might already know but in such a way that it both surprises and delights them. Like a familiar dish prepared in a unique manner, perhaps with unfamiliar or unexpected spices, the goal of the moderate style is to make the listener sit up and take notice. Still, Augustine insists, the point is not to notice either the style or the embellishments for their own sake, but rather that they serve the overall goal of the sermon. Spices can overwhelm a dish, and a preacher who seeks only or even primarily to delight the congregation with rhetorical flourishes runs the same risk. Ultimately, the flourishes and style serve the sermon's goal to "more readily win that audience's assent and stick in its memory."[66]

Moving (Movere)

Finally, any sermon's ultimate goal mirrors and mimics the "universal task of eloquence" in general: "to speak in a way that is geared to persuasion."[67] The grand style of speaking is thus paired with the goal of swaying the congregation. The goal is to move them to do something, or even, we might say, to move them somewhere. "To persuade by speaking," if not the ultimate goal of speaking, renders the entire enterprise irrelevant. Any speaker not attempting to convince her hearer of not only the truth of her position but to persuade them to change their larger perspective and behavior fails in the rhetorical task. More than simple behavioral modification, however, moving the listener resembles the Christian notion of repentance, of turning away from one path and toward another. This goal of preaching most obviously maps onto the pilgrimage motif. The ultimate aim of preaching is to move listeners, regardless of style—whether plain, moderate, or grand—onto a new path.

[66] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.12.28.
[67] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.13.29.

This, then, is what Augustine, following Cicero, refers to as "victory" in moving the listener.[68] For an "audience can be taught and delighted, and still not give their full assent to the speaker," but only when they are moved from one position to another, from one life to another, can victory be claimed. A sermon's goal is not merely a changed mind, but a changed life. Like repentance, the audience is persuaded to do those things and be those people who, as Saint Paul said, "have the desire to do what is good."[69] On our own, we "cannot carry it out." As George Lawless observes: "To teach or instruct (*docere*), to sustain in order to persuade (*placere*), regularly fall within the limited competence of a human agent. To bend the human will, however, (*movere*, *flectere*), pertains to divine agency and the generous promptings of grace."[70]

The Integration of Style and Purpose

While distinguishing the goals of preaching and the styles associated with each, Augustine has qualified and mingled the goals and styles throughout his exposition. Before he finishes, he emphasizes the integration once again. One cannot be moved by language that is either unclear or uninviting. Before closing these sections, Augustine recognizes that "unless the speaker is listened to with understanding and with pleasure, he cannot be listened to with compliance."[71] As Byassee notes: "As in his former rhetorical career, the goal in speaking is here not merely to inform nor to entertain, nor even to persuade another of one's position, but to move the speaker and hearers both toward a specific *telos*. Here, it is to move a congregation to re-embrace the truth of the gospel to which they are already committed."[72]

The Character of the Preacher

Even this proves insufficient. Though in his regular disputes with the Donatists and in various letters to colleagues Augustine notes that even as a crooked stick can be used to draw a straight line, so a corrupt or immoral speaker can preach the truth. The ideal, however, involves coherence

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[68] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.12.27.
[69] Romans 7:18.
[70] George Lawless, "Augustine's *Deacon*: The Discipline of Preaching," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 97.
[71] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* 4.25.55.
[72] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 95.

between the preacher's life and the gospel.[73] Before concluding *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine must insist, especially to younger preachers at the beginning of their ministry: "For us to be listened to with obedient compliance, whatever the grandeur of the speaker's utterances, his manner of life carries more weight."[74] Christ is certainly the truth, but a preacher who attends only to his doctrine and not to his life risks alienating the very listeners under his charge. "Thus it happens that they do not listen obediently to someone who doesn't listen to himself, and that they despise the word of God being preached to them along with the preacher."[75]

Even a great orator like Augustine remained keenly aware of his own shortcomings and admits them at the conclusion of his manual for preachers. After thirty years and thousands of sermons, he concludes *On Christian Doctrine* by saying: "I, for my part, give thanks to our God that in these four books I have set out to the best of my poor ability, not what sort of pastor I am myself, lacking many of the necessary qualities as I do, but what sort the pastor should be who is eager to toil away, not only for his own sake but for others, in the teaching of sound, that is of Christian, doctrine."[76]

Moving Pilgrims on the Way: Pilgrimage as Homiletical Strategy

Taken together, all four books of *On Christian Doctrine* showcase Augustine's understanding of preaching as oriented toward and dependent on the pilgrimage motif. A sermon seeks to move the congregation, not generically, but specifically as pilgrims on the way to their final destination. Preaching involves not merely information delivery or behavioral modification, but identity formation. Augustine, using Scripture's language and stories, seeks to narrate the lives of his congregation such that they see themselves within that language and those stories. This final and ultimate goal of the sermon has, as Müller puts it, a "concrete topographical element to it."[77] The Christian life is defined by the journey to the heavenly city, and "the sermon itself, with its inherent structure of a continuous prose text and at the same time of a running commentary, for a short while not only brings to mind, but also represents the journey itself."[78]

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[73] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* 1.16.20.
[74] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.27.59.
[75] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.27.60.
[76] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.31.64.
[77] Müller, *Preacher*, 178.
[78] Müller, 179.

Müller sees the pilgrim framework as the reason Augustine tends to refrain from mentioning specific details in his sermons. Unlike surviving sermons of Chrysostom or Ambrose, in an Augustinian sermon, she contends, the "external world is mostly blanked out" because "if their goal is to put the listeners in mind of their non-secular existence, external events are a disruptive factor rather than an integrative part of the general picture."[79] While Augustine largely focuses on the biblical text and only rarely mentions events happening outside the basilica walls in Hippo, I contend Müller gets the order wrong. Because Augustine's goal is primarily to move his listeners within the world of the text, it is not that he wants to bracket out external concerns, so much as placing them in their proper order. Instead, as Boyd-MacMillan notes, Augustine's "implicit goal of preaching" is a "holy re-evaluation of loves."[80] As Augustine himself put it, the listener must learn to love things "in the right order," and ensure that they "love what is to be loved."[81] It is not, then, that his sermons lack specificity because they contain a sacred-secular distinction, or focus on what is inside the church walls at the expense of what occurs outside it. Rather, the sermons place events in the temporal sphere in proper relation to the eternal. External events are not "a disruptive factor," but instead ought to be placed under the scrutiny of what Augustine commends as an "impartial evaluation of things."[82] For example, in his preaching Augustine occasionally refers to festivals happening outside the sanctuary, encouraging his congregation to pray for those attending, to attend to the better spectacle happening in worship, or to themselves, "You want to watch spectacles? Very well, be a spectacle yourself."[83]

The Formation of Pilgrim Identity

Through the medium of the sermon, the listener is not so much imported into the world of the biblical text as they are revealed to have always been thus situated. An Augustinian sermon will "serve to reinforce the common identity of its members" as pilgrims.[84] Müller notes that while the

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[79] Müller, 180.
[80] Boyd-MacMillan, "Transforming Sermon," 134.
[81] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.27.28.
[82] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.22.20.
[83] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 39.9*. In his *Exposition of Psalm 147.7*, Augustine admits to attending various festivals and spectacles himself (See *Confessions* III,2,2–4) and urges his congregation to pray for those attending, holding out hope for them and even wondering, "how many may we suppose are sitting there now who in the future will be not only Christians but even bishops?"
[84] Müller, *Preacher*, 182.

Donatists were the primary target of most polemics in an Augustinian sermon, and the most dangerous, they were not "the only problem to beset North African communities."[85] Augustine was keen to orient his listeners' lives to be "welded together more strongly in the face of opposition" more generally, and to accomplish this, he employs the pilgrimage motif specifically. A common identity as pilgrims serves as a buffer against rival identities, and thus, rival communities.

Augustine, as Boyd-MacMillan helpfully notes, "invites the listener to change worlds... Augustine does not offer Christianity as a way to follow, but as a world to inhabit. His sermons are world-forming."[86] A sermon thus constitutes an invitation, not merely to understand the Bible and how it relates to the listeners' lives, but rather, how their lives relate to the Bible. George Lindbeck, while not discussing Augustine explicitly, nonetheless illuminates an Augustinian perspective:

> Typology does not make scriptural contents into metaphors for extrascriptural realities, but the other way around. It does not suggest, as is often said in our day, that believers find their stories in the Bible, but rather that they make the story of the Bible their own story. The cross is not to be viewed as a figurative representation of suffering nor the messianic kingdom as a symbol for hope in the future; rather, suffering should be cruciform, and hopes for the future messianic... Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.[87]

The Sermon as Transformative Practice

Each sermon, then, constitutes a critical Christian practice of re-narrating the world. The listener is taught both that they are on a journey as part of the pilgrim people of God, and that there is an appropriate way of travel. It is a "guided ascent to vision" as Cavadini puts it, or, as Glowasky notes even more specifically, "a journey to the vision of God."[88] Similarly, Byassee observes: "The entire purpose of biblical interpretation is to move those who attend the liturgy to love of God. The active verb—move—is important, for those present are all pilgrims on the way somewhere, and need to be helped along."[89]

This is not mere performance, however. As Sarah Stewart-Kroeker notes: "Rightly perceiving the goal of life and learning to respond accordingly are central to the Christian moral life

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[85] Müller, 183.
[86] Boyd-MacMillan, "Transforming Sermon," 145.
[87] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 118.
[88] Cavadini, "The Sweetness of the Word," 168; Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture*, 158.
[89] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 97.

in Augustine's thought. Robert C. Roberts calls this "attunement to reality" and claims that it must be to a large extent a matter of the "emotional formation of our hearts."[90] This concept of "attunement to reality" provides a helpful descriptor for what Augustine assumed a sermon was accomplishing. Each sermon constituted an effort to teach, delight, and move the listeners to properly understand, delight in, and align their lives to correspond with reality as described in Scripture. Glowasky notes that not just the language of Scripture, but the biblical stories themselves play a significant role in this re-narration. "Augustine admonishes his congregation to follow the example of Moses, and especially of Paul, by keeping in mind the Christian's goal of seeing God but, at the same time, always being aware of created nature's perpetual distance from that goal... the journey he speaks of is, of course, a spiritual and intellectual one."[91]

This observation proves accurate yet incomplete. There is a possibility of missing Augustine's eschatology in the sense that, as the church exists in two phases, one temporal and one eternal, so too does the journey of pilgrimage. In that sense, while the journey currently is spiritual and intellectual, one day, what believers see now in faith and hope will be seen in reality. Or, more properly put, the pilgrim will see with actual, embodied eyes, not merely the eyes of faith. For one day, faith will become sight, and, Augustine is fond of saying, faith will be no more as only love remains.[92] Thus the journey is not merely a spiritual one, but an embodied one.

The Eschatological Dimension

Later, Glowasky more carefully notes that "Throughout his sermons, Augustine presents the Christian life as a journey home, through this fleeting, transitory world to humanity's stable, eternal source. Augustine's homiletic strategy, then, is an exercise in guiding his audience on this journey."[93] Thus the movement Augustine seeks is not bare emotive reaction, but the spurring of "his audience to make progress in their Christian lives" toward a moral life and the beatific vision of God. Similarly, Ployd notes: "Augustine is working with a distinction between faith and sight that separates the way we know God in this world from the way we will know God in the eschaton."[94]

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[90] Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78.
[91] Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture*, 27.
[92] Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.
[93] Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture,* 159.
[94] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church*, 156.

This sight and this knowledge is tied to the proper ordering of love Augustine mentions early in *On Christian Doctrine*. The movement of the pilgrim is a movement in love, to love, spurred and enabled by love. As Byassee notes: "Without their longings properly ordered, Augustine's exposition will necessarily fail. Without scripture their desires will not be properly ordered. The loves, fears, longings, in short affections, of a congregation are essential to its hearing and living the word correctly—that is to say, beautifully."[95] This movement requires the sight of faith, as well as the sight of hope and the sight of love. As Michael Cameron put it: "Christ for Augustine was less a theological proposition and more a way of seeing."[96]

A proper Augustinian sermon, then, serves as a signpost to train the congregation's eyes to see Christ on the journey both through the present age and in the age to come. As pilgrims they are to see Christ revealed in the Scriptures, and this sight through the eyes of faith will one day give way to seeing Christ face to face when they arrive at their final destination. Listening constitutes a training in sight.

> As this continually happens the church's hearers develop spiritual senses able to perceive Christ even here, and so grow toward the love of God that is both journey and destination in this pilgrimage of Christian discipleship. Proper accounts of divine beauty and human desire are then absolutely crucial to a particularly Christian biblical hermeneutic... Grace, and the proper loves and fears that it brings, is a hermeneutical issue.[97]

Conclusion: The Shell and the Sea

This chapter makes several significant contributions to Augustinian scholarship and homiletical theology. First, it provides the first comprehensive analysis of pilgrimage as Augustine's organizing homiletical principle, demonstrating the systematic theological pedagogy underlying his sermonic practice. Second, it advances understanding of the relationship between Augustine's hermeneutical theory and homiletical practice, showing how *On Christian Doctrine* functions as more than interpretive method—it constitutes a comprehensive framework for Christian formation. Third, it contributes to broader discussions of patristic homiletics by demonstrating how Augustine's

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[95] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 98.
[96] Cameron, *Augustine's Construction of Figurative Exegesis*, 234.
[97] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 101.

preaching serves not merely doctrinal instruction but identity formation, offering insights relevant for contemporary homiletical theology.

Augustine's understanding of preaching emerges not as a simple delivery of information or even theological instruction, but as a profound pastoral practice of forming pilgrim identity. Through the rhythm of liturgical preaching, the careful application of rhetorical skill to scriptural interpretation, and the consistent employment of the pilgrimage motif as an organizing framework, Augustine developed a homiletical theology that recognized both the impossibility and the necessity of his task. Like the child with the shell by the seashore, Augustine knew that no amount of eloquence could contain the mystery of God. Yet also like that child, he continued his work—one sermon at a time, one scoop at a time—trusting that even incomplete efforts could participate in the divine economy of grace.

The sermons that survive from Augustine's vast homiletical output represent more than historical artifacts or theological specimens for scholarly analysis. They constitute a living record of one pastor-theologian's sustained effort to form a Christian community capable of recognizing their identity as pilgrims journeying toward the heavenly city. This chapter examines the theological and homiletical rationale behind that sustained effort, arguing that Augustine's sermonic practice represents a sophisticated integration of rhetorical skill, exegetical insight, and pastoral wisdom in service of the ultimate homiletical goal: moving souls along the pilgrim path toward their true home in God. In the chapters that follow, we will discover how the wider sermonic corpus, illustrated by examining key sermons, functions as both map and compass for the pilgrim journey, orienting the faithful toward their ultimate destination while providing practical guidance for the way that lies ahead.

2.

The Church as the Pilgrim People

In a sermon on Psalm 136, Augustine addresses his congregation with a striking designation: "O people of God, O body of Christ, O noble caravan of pilgrims, for you do not spring from Babylon; your homeland is elsewhere."[98] This line encapsulates Augustine's ecclesiology. Augustine's preaching generally, and his preaching on pilgrimage specifically, intends to advance souls along the pilgrim path as a pilgrim people. Within the broader context of his Exposition of Psalm 136, Augustine seeks to transform both the hearts and identity of his congregation, moving them from citizenship in Babylon to a distinctly pilgrim identity. They are citizens of another homeland—a place and city they have never visited but yearn to reach. This city serves as both the source and summit of all their longing while simultaneously representing a place and people to which they already belong. Augustine's ecclesiological preaching aims to replace an identity anchored solely in temporality with one grounded in eternity, moving his hearers from stationary residents of the present age to a pilgrim people journeying toward the age to come. Through this theme, Augustine situates the lives and narrates the story of his congregation: they are already the noble caravan of pilgrims journeying through this life toward the next.

Augustine's listeners must understand both their location and their temporal position to properly comprehend themselves. More crucially, they must know their destination. What proved essential for their understanding becomes key to our apprehension of Augustine's ecclesiology. This study argues that Augustine's pilgrim motif represents not merely a rhetorical or homiletical technique but rather constitutes the fundamental hermeneutical lens through which he understands the church's ontological status and temporal existence. This pilgrim imagery stands central to Augustine's ecclesiology and deserves priority in any examination of his conception and theology of the Church, for it provides the interpretive framework that unifies his otherwise dispersed ecclesiological reflections.

This analysis will make several contributions to Augustinian scholarship. First, it will demonstrate that the pilgrim motif provides the missing systematic unity that scholarship has noted is absent from Augustine's ecclesiological writings. Rather than lamenting Augustine's lack of a formal *De Ecclesia*, I argue his sermonic corpus provides a coherent, if non-systematic, ecclesiological

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[98] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.12

vision organized around the pilgrim theme. Second, this study challenges the persistent scholarly tendency to view Augustine's "other-worldliness" as problematic. Instead of defending Augustine against charges of excessive transcendence or attempts to minimize his eschatological focus, I argue his other-worldly orientation provides the necessary theological foundation for meaningful engagement with temporal realities. The pilgrim framework enables rather than inhibits faithful action in the present precisely because it locates present identity in future hope. Third, this analysis reveals how Augustine's use of the *totus Christus* principle operates not merely as an exegetical technique but as an ecclesiological foundation. The church's corporate identity as the body of Christ makes possible the journey *as* rather than merely *with* the body of Christ. This corporate rather than individualistic understanding of pilgrimage distinguishes Augustine's vision from both ancient philosophical models of the soul's journey and modern therapeutic approaches to spiritual formation.

Close textual examination will demonstrate Augustine's consistent hermeneutical recourse to pilgrim imagery across disparate biblical texts and diverse sermonic occasions. His expositions of psalms, gospel texts, and liturgical seasons consistently yield the same ecclesiological insight: the Church's essential identity as a pilgrim community. This interpretive uniformity suggests that pilgrimage functions as Augustine's primary theological category rather than merely decorative metaphor, serving as the conceptual lens through which he comprehends both scriptural meaning and ecclesial reality.

This chapter argues that the pilgrim motif deserves pride of place in understanding Augustine's ecclesiology as illustrated in his sermons especially, not merely as one rhetorical device among others, but as the organizing and unifying principle that provides coherence to his otherwise dispersed ecclesiological reflections. It will explore Augustine's understanding of the temporal location of the church, as well as elucidate an Augustinian other-worldly ecclesiology. The chapter concludes with a close reading of key sermons that illustrate Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology. I examine this ecclesiology through Mary and Martha motif from sermons 255, as well as 103 and 104. Two additional sermons, Exposition of Psalm 41 [42] and Exposition of Psalm 136 [137], illustrate Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology as the "noble caravan of pilgrims." Augustine's preaching on the church, for the church, is intended to move souls onto and along the path as the noble caravan of pilgrims. The pilgrim paradigm serves a dual hermeneutical function, providing both the conceptual foundation for Augustine's ecclesiological ontology and the methodological framework for his pastoral approach to congregational identity formation.

Pilgrim Ecclesiology

In his sermon on Psalm 76 [77], Augustine pauses to reflect on the act of preaching itself. Referencing the need for illumination in darkness, he observes: "Perhaps that is an image of what we are doing at this very moment, for by expounding these scriptures we are bringing in a lamp, so that even amid our night we may find joy." This extends beyond simple metaphor; within the larger context of this sermon, Augustine shapes the church's identity while illuminating its present moment. Though night persists for the church as it awaits the time when "daylight floods the skies at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory," the present moment contains elements of that day. The current era represents "night by contrast with that future day for which we long, but day by contrast with the former night we have left behind."[99] During this interim period, before the final day arrives, Augustine's preaching functions as a lamp illuminating his congregation's path, giving form to their steps and guiding their souls on the pilgrim journey.

Augustine employs pilgrimage imagery both descriptively of the Church and prescriptively for its life and witness. He aims to transform both the affections and actions of his congregation by reshaping their identity toward that of a pilgrim people. Continuing in his sermon on Psalm 76, Augustine instructs believers to "seek God with outstretched hands now," engaging not only their affections but their entire lives. "Let our works not flag; let us seek God, not yearn ineffectually for him. If we are on the way, let us spend whatever is necessary to bring us to the goal: let us seek God by our actions."[100] Identity shapes action in Augustine's understanding.

The pilgrimage motif represents more than occasional sermonic imagery; it constitutes one of Augustine's primary ways of speaking about the church. This pilgrim ecclesiology provides structure and form to what many scholars consider Augustine's indirect and even unsystematic teaching on the church's nature. Across diverse scriptural texts and motifs, Augustine discerns the pilgrim people. While Augustine's sense of exile, wandering, and alienation in his *Confessions* appears to draw primarily on Luke's Parable of the Prodigal Son, his sermons derive much inspiration for the pilgrimage theme—including exile, alienation, and related concepts—from Israel's Old Testament experience generally and the Exodus account particularly.[101]

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[99] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 76.4

[100] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 76.4

[101] So, for example, when Augustine is preaching on Psalm 24, he says, "Turned out of paradise by you, and wandering to a far-off country, I cannot return by my own strength unless you come to meet me in my

Augustine need not draw exclusively from single sources or text series for his ecclesiology. As Van Bavel observes, Augustine's ecclesiology "is not a static but a dynamic one. Many meanings and levels are interconnected without coinciding completely."[102] Similarly, Grabowski identifies perhaps the primary challenge in studying Augustine's ecclesiology: the absence of formal systematic treatment. While Augustine carefully and thoroughly develops much of his thought and theology in comprehensive treatises, his ecclesiology remains more dispersed. As Grabowski explains:

> Saint Augustine has at no time written anything that approximates to a systematic treatise on the church. Some points of his doctrine are stressed and defended, but others are merely mentioned casually. Some elements are gleaned from polemical treatises, others from instructional and exhortative works. In all of them are to be found myriads of pieces of mosaic from which can be formed a whole, rich picture of a church which the African Bishop defended, promoted, and loved. No Father of the Church nor Scholastic supplies us with more wealth of thought on the church and manifests more zealous devotion than the bishop of Hippo.[103]

Michael McCarthy joins the scholarly chorus noting Augustine's multiplicity of ecclesiological images. As he observes, "To hunt the works of Augustine in order to construct a conceptually precise *De Ecclesia* is to fail in appreciating the peculiar dynamism of ancient thinking about the church, its unsystematic, highly rhetorical and frequently polemical aspects."[104] In this sense, ancient thinking about the church generally and Augustine's ecclesiology particularly mirrors not only Scripture's content but also its form. In seeking to transform his congregation's identity into that of a pilgrim people, Augustine's sermons—with their multiplicity of images and metaphors concerning the church—reflect the varied and overlapping ways Scripture itself speaks about the church. If Scripture provides a refracted lens through which to view the church, one can safely assume the

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wandering, for my return has been waiting upon your mercy throughout the whole stretch of earthly time," this could be taken as a reference to the prodigal. However, a vast majority of the ways in which Augustine utilizes similar language and imagery in his sermons, it is mostly inspired by the story of Israel. As he says in Sermon 4.9, "Those ones come out after the Red Sea and journey through the desert; so too Christians after baptism are not yet in the promised land, but live in hope. This age is the desert, and desert indeed it is for Christians after baptism, if they understand what they have received. If it is not merely bodily gestures that have been performed over them but there is also a spiritual effect in their hearts, they will understand that for them this world is a desert, they will understand that they are living as wandering exiles, longing for their native land. All the time they are longing for it, though, they are living in hope."

[102] Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, "The Church", in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald (Eerdmans, 1999), 169.

[103] Grabowski, *The Church*, 4.

[104] Michael McCarthy, S.J., "An Ecclesiology of Groaning: Augustine, the Psalms and the Making of Church" in *Theological Studies*, 66 (2005), 24.

same of those looking through that lens and teaching their congregations from it. Augustine's lens functions as a biblical mirror, showing his congregation what he perceives.

The Unifying Function of the Pilgrim Motif

Though Augustine left no systematic treatment of the church, this pilgrim ecclesiology can still be considered a unifying motif across his writings generally and throughout his sermons particularly. Recognizing that "Augustine's concept of the church is very complex but not incoherent,"[105] Van Bavel notes various distinctions and metaphors in Augustine's ecclesiological preaching, including pilgrimage. However, where Van Bavel identifies one metaphor among several and one image within a larger rhetorical arsenal, this study argues for the priority of the pilgrim motif as the hermeneutical key that unlocks Augustine's ecclesiological vision.

Augustine wrote extensively on the motif of the two cities as central to both his political and moral theology, and he preached regularly on the two cities theme. While the two cities motif has been given extensive treatment, the pilgrimage motif has attracted less attention. Though employing the specific terminology of "pilgrim" infrequently in *The City of God*, the concept of the Church as pilgrims journeying toward the city of God features prominently in his sermonic material. The two cities motif and the pilgrimage motif represent the same reality, for "their fellow-citizens are also fellow-pilgrims."[106] Augustine uses the pilgrim motif extensively in his sermons, both to illustrate and elaborate his two cities conception. This evocative image—the pilgrim wandering the earth as citizen of a heavenly city, not yet home but en route—provided Augustine's hearers with their earthly coordinates. This imagery situated their present lives, reminded them of the past, and oriented them toward the future. Within this framework, Augustine uses the sense of pilgrimage to communicate not only the church's destination but also its temporal location. Augustine preaches on pilgrimage to guide his hearers as a pilgrim people toward a proper understanding of time, eternity, and their place within both.

The Church's Temporal Location: Living in the "Time In Between"

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[105] Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "Church," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia,* ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 169.
[106] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.2

For Augustine, the church exists simultaneously on temporal and eternal planes.[107] In his Exposition of Psalm 30, Augustine describes the church in the present as existing in "this time in between, while...still on pilgrimage in this world."[108] This conception of the church as existing in a liminal "time in between"—situated in time yet destined for something beyond time—fundamentally shapes Augustine's ecclesiology. Similarly, in his, Exposition of Psalm 36, Augustine speaks of the "journey through time."[109] While the church as presently constituted can only think, speak, and act within temporal boundaries, this condition remains temporary. The church journeys toward eternity, when time itself will cease at the conclusion of the pilgrimage.[110] The city that is the church now and will one day achieve completion exists as a place extending into eternity.[111]

As time advances, so does the pilgrim, whether consciously recognized or not.[112] Augustine's preaching aims to foster this recognition among his congregation and inspire corresponding lifestyle choices. In multiple respects, to be alive means existing not only as temporal, contingent beings, but as pilgrims journeying toward that which lies beyond temporal existence. As Peter Sanlon observes,

> In preaching, Augustine was concerned with temporality in that he helped people interpret their created lives as part of the Bible's narrative. Augustine viewed life as a race which must be run: nobody can opt out and stand still in the race towards death. Preaching scripture was an opportunity for him to offer people a richer, more fulsome, narratival view of the race.[113]

For Augustine, the question never concerns whether a person travels a path, but which path they traverse.

Only when following the correct path can people be formed into the pilgrim people they are called to become. Stewart-Kroeker recognizes this dynamic: "For Augustine, formation for life with Christ happens in the context of the church. The journey is undertaken in the company of the body of Christ. The picture of the church as a community of wayfarers—the pilgrim City—indicates the

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[107] See also, Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 39; 131.10; Homily on John 124.5; and Sermon 255.1
[108] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 4 of Psalm 30.8
[109] Augustine, *Exposition 2 of Psalm* 36.16
[110] "The reading of the gospel which we have just heard appeals to the humility of us all, to see and acknowledge where we are, and to what destination we should be hurrying."
Sermon 75.1
[111] On the eternal destination, see for example, Sermon 80.7; sermon 104.4; Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.9; 136.22; 121.2.
[112] When Augustine refers to pilgrims or travelers, he primarily has in mind the Christian as part of the Church. He does, however, also infrequently use the term to refer to humanity in general. For Augustine, everyone is on the pilgrim journey; some know it, some know it not; some on the path to glory, others on the path to destruction. See, for example, Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 118:19; 66.5.
[113] Peter Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching,* (Fortress Press, 2014), 86.

close relationship between belonging to the church and becoming a pilgrim."[114] When she writes that the "journey is undertaken in the company of the body of Christ," she envisions individual Christians as parts of a larger community. Yet for Augustine, the journey occurs not merely *in the company* of the Body of Christ, as though these were isolated individuals within a voluntary association.[115] Instead, the journey is undertaken *as* the body of Christ. The journey is not simply taken *with* the church; the journey is taken *as* the church. In his Exposition of the Psalm 66.5, Augustine preaches: "Christ is the truth, and Christ is the way; walk, then... You walk by me, you walk in me, and you find rest in me." To journey in, with, and through Christ means connection to and participation in his body. Augustine perceives the noble caravan of pilgrims not as isolated individuals but as one body traversing the singular path toward the singular destination.

Augustine's initial step involves preaching recognition of the journey itself; subsequently, he elaborates on both the journey and its destination.[116] This theme provided not only abstract coherence to his ecclesiology but also practical unity for his congregation. To survey any cathedral revealed tremendous diversity among Augustine's listeners, including people at various stages of joining or participating in church life. Scandals and "questionable people" mingled with the faithful. Looking beyond immediate surroundings revealed entirely different churches—rival sects competing for authority. Already in the fourth century, choices extended beyond whether to participate in and join a church to include which church to choose. How, then, should one approach this unusual community and the question of participation? For Augustine, the solution lies in recognizing that one is already on a journey.

The progress Augustine seeks through his sermons on and for pilgrim people extends beyond simple movement away from this world toward the next. Rather, his preaching attempts to guide listeners along that path in a particular manner. Augustine's pilgrim people are called to be citizens *now* of the city toward which their pilgrimage tends. He does not merely encourage enduring this life until eventual departure. Instead, his pilgrim people advance toward the next world by living as pilgrim people within this one.

The Ecclesiology of Groaning and the Psalms as Pilgrim Songs

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[114] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation,* 164.
[115] See, for example, Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.6; 86.5; 123.1; 136.22; *Sermon* 119.
[116] For the mix of people present in any given sermon, see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 169; Brown, *Augustine*, 183-197; van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop,* 129-132.

As the outline of Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology takes shape, so too does what McCarthy calls an "ecclesiology of groaning."[117] McCarthy rightly argues that to be on pilgrimage involves a longing for what is yet to come. An ecclesiology of groaning is honest not just about the human condition, but about the unlooked-for and unforeseen obstacles along the way in the church as the church. To groan as a human is common to all. To groan as part of the church is common only to the caravan of pilgrims that are, more often than not, less than noble.

As McCarthy points out, the psalms are a critical resource for Augustine in both naming and expressing the longing and groaning in the church. While McCarthy is certainly correct to emphasize Augustine's interest in the psalms for the life of his congregation, it will not do to say that Augustine is interested in "how the Psalms apply to his congregation."[118] Augustine is keen to move his people to engage and embody the psalms more fully as their songs and prayers spoken in, with, and through Christ. The psalms do not merely apply to them, as if they were an addendum to their regular speech or their lives.[119] The Psalms already are their speech—they merely need to recognize them as such. Just as one must recognize that one is a pilgrim, so too one must recognize that the psalms are travelers' songs. Similarly, when McCarthy suggests that the Psalms are unique among the biblical books as "formally assimilable to the lives of those who hear them," this too misses how Augustine is keen to re-narrate the lives of his congregation. In just the same way that the Psalms are their songs, so the Exodus is their history, the Ten Commandments their law, the prophets their future, and the Gospels their story of redemption. Augustine's ecclesiology originates from his biblical hermeneutic.

Augustine's "Other-Worldly" Ecclesiology

Augustine frequently faces accusations of an excessive other-worldliness that allegedly supersedes and subsumes all sense of morality, ethics, virtue, and politics. Thomas Dixon, for example, argued that Augustine's emphasis on eschatology and pilgrimage created nothing but a "barren earthly

[117] McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning", 24.
[118] McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning", 24.
[119] A note to his congregation likewise applies to McCarthy here, "It's not like the way you understand it; it is, however, like the way you ought to understand it." Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.3

terrain."[120] Similarly, Hannah Arendt offered harsh criticism of the Bishop of Hippo, accusing him of leaving behind a "desert of this world" through his predominant focus on the future.[121] Martha Nussbaum suggests Augustine's account of pilgrimage "does not bode well for earthly justice" and even endorsed Nietzsche's assessment that Augustine essentially provides little impetus for action in this life when focus centers on the life to come.[122]

More recently, theologians have sought to rescue Augustine from those who perceive only pessimism in his work. Rowan Williams, Michael Lamb, and Sarah Stewart-Kroeker argue that these anxieties misread Augustine. He proves less pessimistic than critics suggest, they variously contend, and readers might discover a hopeful disposition when employing the proper interpretive lens.[123] Nevertheless, the perception of Augustine as "other-worldly" persists, and most scholars agree this represents either something to reject, minimize, or explain away. All seem to concede *prima facie*, however, Johnny Cash's point that we should avoid being so heavenly minded that we become no earthly good.

This study argues, however, that these misreadings do disservice to Augustine, who functions neither as strict pessimist nor as optimist in contemporary formulations, but rather as a preacher shaping and forming the identity of a premodern congregation. Especially when attention is paid to his sermons, it allows us to draw out the nuance that is otherwise missed: they intend to move listeners not from pessimistic to optimistic viewpoints, but rather from an identity rooted in "this present evil age" to one that has "cast its hope ahead like an anchor."[124] On this point, Lamb convincingly argues that pessimistic readings of Augustine miss his rhetorical goals. Augustine, Lamb contends, serves as a "subtle and sophisticated teacher of hope" who "allows love and hope for political goods and whose political thought is more open to pluralism than most interpreters assume."[125] Lamb argues that Augustine's rhetoric often escapes modern interpreters who inadvertently import contemporary categories. Augustine shows no interest in either optimism or

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120 Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55.
121 Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19.
122 Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), 553.
123 See, especially, Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, "World-Weariness and Augustine's Eschatological Ordering of Emotions in enarratio in Psalmum 36." in: *Augustinian Studies*, 2016, vol. 47, no. 2, 201–226; Rowan Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," in *Interpretation* 58 no 1 (2004): 17-27; and Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine's Political Thought* (Princeton, 2022).
124 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 42.2
125 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope,* 263, 265.

pessimism as categories; as Lamb observes, Augustine pursues a biblical framework of faith, hope, and love.

Consequently, the ecclesiology found in Augustine's sermons represents a distinctly teleological orientation that shapes and defines how pilgrim people should live. Pilgrim people journey toward something other-worldly, and that future provides definition for living as citizens of that future city while dwelling within an earthly one. In his Exposition of Psalm 122, Augustine evocatively relates the church's different states as maid, bride, and wife—representing the church as Christ found her, the church as she exists in Christ now, and the church as she will become.[126] "Who else marries a bride by dying for her?" he wonders. Augustine's pilgrimage theme represents neither optimism nor pessimism, but rather a corrective lens for viewing both the church and all reality. Pilgrims journey through the world toward God who serves as the source and summit of faith, hope, and love. For Augustine, being other-worldly provides the only ground for faith, hope, and love, and thus the primary way of being Christian.

Precisely through this other-worldly ecclesiology, Augustine maintains tension where others perceive categorical distinction. McCarthy notes a recurring misperception of Augustine's ecclesiology. "Thus a common paradigm, which finds in Augustine two distinct ecclesiologies—the church visible and invisible, the earthly church and the heavenly Church—continues to influence our perception and leads to claims that Augustine's sense of church is marked by an 'ultraspiritualism' or Platonic idealization that ignores the concrete ecclesial reality."[127] However common this paradigm, it remains mistaken. While certainly appropriate to acknowledge Augustine's distinction between visible and invisible church, this does not entail separate ecclesiologies. Augustine holds the two in tension, sometimes with obvious difficulty, yet there exist not two distinct ecclesiologies but merely one other-worldly church in this world journeying toward another. As noted above, the Church already exists as maid, bride, and wife, though not in final and complete sense.

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[126] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 122.5, "This maid has been endowed with great dignity before God, because she has become a wife. But for the present, until she attains the spiritual embrace where she may without fear enjoy him whom she has loved, and for whom she has sighed on her tedious pilgrimage, she is still a bride." Or, more evocatively yet, in Sermon 213, Augustine notes the Church is a whore who has been made a virgin. "Let us honor her, because she is the bride of so great a Lord. And what am I to say? Great and unheard of is the bridegroom's gracious generosity; he found her a whore, he made her a virgin."

[127] Michael McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning", 28.

This "unfinished or unrealized quality of the church," as McCarthy terms it, remains at the forefront of Augustine's ecclesiological reflections precisely because it represents a church in transit. To be a pilgrim en route means, by definition, not having arrived at the final destination. In precisely this way, Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology deftly dismisses any notions of being "ultraspiritual" or excessively other-worldly. When preaching to pilgrim people, Augustine seeks to move them toward being other-worldly in this world. Augustine illuminates the destination, yet this does not entail ignoring either the traveler's conditions or the world through which they journey. Quite the opposite. In his Exposition of Psalm 66, Augustine links eternal identity with temporal perspective when he says, "This question is put to the Church: *Do you not know yourself?"* He contends that his congregation, as part of the Catholic communion across time and space, "has been made in the image of God," has been "redeemed by the blood of the stainless Lamb," and are those who "carry God's face upon us." As such, they must "consider how valuable you are, reflect on the immense price paid for you." Part of the consideration Augustine encourages in his congregation is their identity as pilgrims. He continues in a sort of sermonic prayer, "Enable us to recognize both where we are going and the way by which we must travel."[128] Augustine suggests that only when one recognizes their status as traveler and understands their pilgrimage's direction can they properly locate themselves on life's present path.

Even cursory familiarity with Augustine's episcopal work—its daily tasks and mundane duties—should give modern readers pause before assuming any divergence between stated and operative theology, as some are forced to do, either explicitly or implicitly.[129] Regarding Augustine's ecclesiology as ultraspiritual requires assuming a sharp dichotomy between the daily church work to which he devoted himself and his perspective amid the scandals, controversies, and growing pains of fourth- and fifth-century church life.[130] As McCarthy helpfully summarizes:

> Augustine's frequent reminder that we groan in the present condition suggests a form of resistance to premature solutions of the multiple problems that he faced as a fifth-century bishop. The eschatological sense, both of scripture and of the church, did not deliver him from real tensions or provide a way for him to escape into an overly spiritualized exegesis or ecclesiology. Rather, it urged patience with pains of disagreement, the effects of scandal, the

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[128] Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 66.5.
[129] Nussbaum, for example, as we have seen accuses Augustine of leaving a "desert of this world," but in order to suggest this requires one to ignore the daily duties of ministry Augustine gave so much time and energy to, or to suggest that his theology and ministry practices do not align.
[130] For a summation of all that Augustine gave himself to once ordained and especially as bishop in Hippo, see van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop,* 129-140.

> bonds with those who cause us grief and embarrassment. His practice of exegesis, finally, was a practice of charity.[131]

Either Augustine's ecclesiology remains uninformed by his daily episcopal and homiletical practice, or contemporary theological readings of his sermons lack understanding of their interrelation. One struggles to read sermons offering hope in this life, for this life, while maintaining focus on life beyond as ultraspiritual. As Lamb notes, "Augustine offers an inaugurated eschatology that recognizes how citizens can experience the first fruits of the Kingdom here and now."[132] Furthermore, the sermons themselves contain numerous examples of Augustine encouraging virtue, restraint, charity, care for the poor, and various other instances of concern for those in present life. As noted above, in Augustine's sermon on Psalm 76, the pilgrim must "seek God by our actions."[133]

Ployd articulates the transcendence toward which Augustine points: "In training his audience to look beyond the material city of Jerusalem, Augustine also trains them to look beyond the terrestrial Church toward the spiritual reality that is the basis for its identity."[134] Pilgrim ecclesiology trains eyes to look up, out, and beyond what physical sight can perceive, reaching instead toward the heart's vision. The church, in this sense, is not merely seen but believed.[135]

Modern readers tend to miss Augustine's sermonic goals precisely because they misunderstand his spiritual exegetical approach. Lamb argues that modern readers tend to miss the importance of Augustine's rhetoric, failing to appreciate, "the rhetorical and pedagogical purposes of Augustine's work." This glaring oversight, which Lamb considers a projection of a modern understanding of philosophy onto a more ancient form of Augustine, neglects "a more capacious vision of [Augustine's] moral and political thought."[136] Similarly, Michael Cameron contends that modern readers miss Augustine's primarily scriptural approach. Missing Augustine's hermeneutic means missing the sermon's purpose. As Cameron observes, biblical scholars have criticized Augustine for his spiritual exegesis, and "in reply Augustine might say that modern readers commit their own form-mistake in expecting from the sermons things they were not designed to say or

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131 McCarthy, "Ecclesiology of Groaning", 47-48.
132 Lamb, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 173.
133 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 76.4
134 Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Dontatist Sermons,* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 36.
135 Augustine is fond of quoting Isaiah 7:9 and noting especially to catechumens but also those seeking God, "believe in order to understand," pre-empting Anselm's famous dictum "*Credo ut intelligam"* by 600 years.
136 Lamb, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 118.

do."[137] Repeated claims that Augustine proves other-worldly miss what he attempts to accomplish in his sermons and form within his congregation.

In emphasizing the formative aspect of Augustine's pilgrimage usage, Sarah Stewart-Kroeker's work provides a helpful framework for understanding Augustine's sermonic goals as bishop. His primary task, she notes, involves forming those under his pastoral care. While others might make a "form-mistake," Stewart-Kroeker rightly emphasizes the formative goals of Augustine's sermons. "Through the Holy Spirit, Christ makes the church his body. In this important sense, the church is the site of the ongoing mediation of the divine-human relationship."[138] The preaching of the Church, and by extension, that of Augustine, is one tool in the repertoire of the Spirit to both constitute the church as the Body of Christ while also conforming them to that identity.

Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology maintains the fundamental tension between the present and eschatological dimensions of Christian existence, encompassing both the temporal journey and its ultimate destination. "For Augustine the vision of God was the goal of all human striving...maintaining that mystical union might be achieved by faith in the incarnation, before worthiness is established."[139] This theological framework renders Augustine's ecclesiology resistant to binary categorization—neither exclusively temporal nor wholly eschatological but dialectically incorporating both realities. The standard characterization of ecclesiastical existence within two separate ages inadequately represents the partially realized eschatology that informs Augustine's ecclesiological perspective. Two ages exist, but only one church moves through them.

As Ployd effectively argues, "this heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual reality in which the earthly, sojourning church participates and finds its identity."[140] The heavenly Jerusalem therefore represents not merely future fulfillment but a present spiritual reality that has entered temporal existence. The Church participates in this eschatological reality within historical time while awaiting complete realization. Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology thus enables him to recognize within Scripture

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[137] "Biblical scholars have judged Augustine for what James Barr called the "form-mistake" of his spiritual exegesis, wherein he wrongly reads a whole into a part, as in reading the entire Christian economy into the parable of the Good Samaritan." Michael Cameron, "Totus Christus and the Psychagogy of Augustine's Sermons" in *Augustinian Studies* 36:1 (2005), 59.
[138] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage*, 165.
[139] Cameron, "Totus Christus," 59
[140] "Moreover, because previous texts have established that this heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual reality in which the earthly, sojourning church participates and finds its identity, these exercises in intellectual and moral ascent represent the proper disposition with which one ought to approach the church…" Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church,* 41.

a unified ecclesial reality that transcends temporal boundaries while engaging historical circumstances. In order to illustrate Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology, we now turn to a close reading of several key sermons that highlight the motif.

Mary, Martha, and the One Church in Two Ages

The one Church exists in two ages for Augustine because it is on pilgrimage through this age into the next. Augustine's preaching seeks to move the hearts of this one pilgrim people onto and along this pilgrim path. As Augustine reads Scripture and teaches others to read it, he emphasizes the continuity between the old covenant and the new, between this present age and the age to come. The church exists in both, and the pilgrimage motif affords Augustine the opportunity to recognize the discontinuity between the ages while appreciating and emphasizing their continuity. While Augustine employs the theme of two cities throughout his sermons, there are key passages where he relates this notion specifically to his ecclesiology. Taking his cue from the story of Mary and Martha, Augustine discovers what he considers the key to unlocking the mystery surrounding the church—especially a church beset by scandals, division, and trouble such as his own.

Though only a brief pericope in the Lukan text, the story of Mary and Martha has generated vast scholarly interest. The juxtaposition of these two sisters has been a source of both inspiration and controversy, depending on the reader's perspective. While contemporary scholars, pastors, preachers, devotional writers, and lay readers tend to focus on the implications for individuals—whether through feminist readings, evangelical devotional approaches, or other frameworks—Augustine's interest in the story was primarily ecclesial.[141] No stranger to juxtapositions in his preaching, Augustine saw the story of Mary and Martha not primarily as an issue of gender differences, discipleship styles, or individual concerns, but rather as a lens for understanding the

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[141] For various readings of this story focused on gender issues, see, for example, Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Religious and Social Thought* (New York: Cambridge, 1995), 141; Loveday C. Alexander, "Sisters in Adversity" in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. by Amy Jill Levine, (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 202; for feminist readings, see, for example, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 55; Robert Price, *The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist-Critical Survey*, 178; Veronica Koperski, "Women and Discipleship in Luke 10:38-42 and Acts 6:1-7: *The Literary Context of Luke-Acts" in A Feminist Companion to Luke*, 162 and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 52; Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, "A feminist critical interpretation for liberation: Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42." Religion and Intellectual Life 3 (1986): 32; for a rather typical contemporary devotional usage of the account, see Joanna Weaver, *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*, (Colorado Springs CO: Waterbrook, 2000), 3.

church and her relationship to time. Examining several key sermons on this Lukan story provides greater clarity on the pilgrim perspective through which Augustine interpreted this narrative.

Sermon 255: Liturgical Time and Ecclesial Identity

Likely preached in Carthage later in his career, Sermon 255 establishes the initial contrast between Mary and Martha on temporal ecclesiological grounds. Augustine presents this entire story as paradigmatic for the church in time. He begins by noting that he addresses the Carthaginian congregation during "alleluia time," a reference to the liturgical season of Eastertide.[142] Augustine observes that while they celebrate the Easter season, they also say alleluia every day. Every day presents an opportunity for praise, each day constituting part of alleluia time for those living beyond Christ's resurrection. Augustine identifies an overlapping intersection of time as it relates to the Church and her life—she is an Easter people who sing alleluia in the present.

However, Augustine quickly situates this liturgical alleluia time within its larger context. Lest his congregation forget, they have not yet entered final alleluia time, but instead, "during this time of our exile and our wandering, we say alleluia to cheer us on our way. At present alleluia is for us a traveler's song; but by a toilsome road we are wending our way to home and rest." Alleluia is presently a song of travelers, the "noble band of pilgrims" who are "wending their way home."[143] Alleluia time must be situated both in its present context and its future reality. Liturgically, all of life is lived in Lent, for the promise of one final Easter lies still ahead. Yet for pilgrims who know they are on the way and understand where that way leads, the calendar affords them alleluia time as liturgical time beckoning them onward toward glory. The tension inherent in liturgical time finds expression within the sermon Augustine delivers.

Once he establishes the juxtaposition of both the temporal and transcendent reality of his congregation—once he establishes that they are those in exile, wandering pilgrims on the way to final alleluia time in eternity—only then does he press the point further through the juxtaposition of Mary and Martha. The two sisters represent not different roles in the church, nor different attitudes toward Christ, nor even distinct postures of discipleship. Instead, the figures of Mary and Martha represent the Body of Christ in different ages. Augustine employs this story to move his congregation deeper into their identity as a pilgrim people.

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[142] Augustine, *Sermon 255.1*
[143] Augustine, *Sermon 255.1*

Ecclesial Rather Than Individual Interpretation

Contrary to how the story has often been presented in contemporary settings, Augustine's exposition reveals that *both* Mary and Martha embody the church. Martha signifies the church in its present struggle upon the earth; Mary signifies the church at rest in her final state of glory. The primary question regarding Mary and Martha is not whether to be Mary or Martha, but *when* the church is each. Augustine demonstrates awareness that this text could function as a moral tale asking which sister his listeners should attempt to embody, but he rejects this interpretive framework. This is not, therefore, primarily a story about gender or complementary roles at all. Rather, Augustine seeks to move his congregation as the body of Christ to see themselves as not one or the other, but both sisters—temporally distinguished.

In this present state of exile and wandering, individuals as well as the created order itself exist in a state of need, of hunger and thirst along the way. As such, Martha was "engaged in journey business."[144] Certainly, Augustine points out, what Martha was doing will not endure in the same way that hunger and thirst will not endure. A pilgrim is not a pilgrim forever but eventually arrives at her destination, so the church as exemplified by Martha currently engages in the "business of the exile" but will not always do so. The church in the present should not expect to be at rest as Mary is, for that is not its current condition. Mary represents a future reality for the church; Martha represents her present. Far from positioning Martha in an inferior role, Augustine actually encourages his congregation to embody Martha's posture as she attends to the needs of those who hunger and thirst. Even though physical needs such as these will one day pass away, attending to them remains in the present "a great work."[145]

Only once the church understands itself as Martha can it have any hope of reaching Mary's status. Do not presume, Augustine suggests, to already enjoy the rest that Mary experiences in the story or even to aspire to it in the present. "For the time being they shall hope, as long as they are on the road," he writes. Remember you are on the way—you have not yet arrived—and so you are people of hope. Hope, by definition, looks forward, leans forward, and continues walking forward in life's journey. "And here we are with hope suckling us, hope nourishing us, hope building us up, and

[144] Augustine, *Sermon 255.2*
[145] Augustine, *Sermon 255.2*

giving us consolation and comfort in this life of toil. It's in this hope that we sing alleluia."[146] The familiar juxtaposition of hope and reality, promise and fulfillment, appears prominently in Augustine's exposition of this text. Here, on this earth, in this age, during this time of exile and wandering, Christians have hope. There, he implies, Christians will possess what they hope for.

This hope, however, is not merely deferred. "Just look what joy there is in hope," he writes.[147] While we have no final satisfaction here, we do receive sufficient glimpses of this final satisfaction such that joy can be present now.[148] The transcendent reality of both their present situation and their future rest provides his congregation with both hope and purpose, a sense of time and eternity.

Mary and Martha represent the two ages of the church: the age of hope and the age of reality, the age of hunger and the age of satisfaction, the age of thirst and the age of satiety. Sermon 255 serves as an exercise in moving his congregation not just further along the pilgrim path, but in transitioning their identity from Martha to Mary. Once they recognize which age they inhabit, his congregation can act accordingly. After using Mary and Martha descriptively of transcendent reality, he employs the juxtaposition prescriptively for present life. Mary and Martha then represent not only two different ages of the church but "two kinds of life."[149] If Mary embodies the life of delight and rest while Martha embodies the life of need and toil, it follows that the Church's life ought not only to see itself reflecting Martha but actively embodying her. Hers is a "good work," and in attending to physical needs, she was attending to her Lord. Augustine develops this juxtaposition not to establish a strict dualism, as is often charged. This represents no simple association of the heavenly as good and the earthly as deficient. Such dualism fails to capture the nuance Augustine employs in his sermon.

While Augustine will indeed point to the "one thing necessary" of Mary and warn his congregation against assuming that true joy and rest can be found in this life, he also reminds them of Martha's good work in the present. This reflects his broader theological concern to be careful "not to live ahead of time."[150] In fact, only when one recognizes that this life offers partial fulfillment and partial joy can one pursue the tasks of "exile business" with integrity and courage.

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146 Augustine, *Sermon 255.5*
147 Augustine, *Sermon 255.5*
148 We will examine joy as a pilgrim posture in chapter 3.
149 Augustine, *Sermon 255.6*
150 In Letter 189 written in 418, Augustine addresses the Roman general Boniface with a similar theme when he writes, "We ought not to want to live ahead of time with only the saints and the righteous."

Hope consoles us on the journey, he regularly notes, and it is in hope that we sing this traveler's song now, even as we perform the good work of toil, tending to physical needs—our own and others'—in service to our Lord.

Sermon 103: Pilgrimage and Present Service

Two additional sermons from Augustine further develop the Mary and Martha juxtaposition. While Sermon 255 took its cues primarily from the liturgical moment of "alleluia time," using the Lukan story to expound that liturgical reality, Sermons 103 and 104 appear to have been preached following the reading of the gospel story in Luke itself.

As in Sermon 255, Augustine begins Sermon 103 by situating his listeners as those on the way. He introduces the key themes immediately and develops the details through Mary and Martha. While his congregation may have wondered how they might attempt to be like Mary, whom Jesus seems to commend for attending to the "one thing necessary," Augustine reorients them immediately. The one thing is not attainable in this life and is in fact that toward which "we are making our way, as we cope with multiple toils and troubles of this world, this age." This straightforward sermonic move is nonetheless notably pastoral, situating his congregation in the present as those who cannot help but belong to this age with its many dangers, toils, and snares. "We are still only making our way, though, as travelers, not yet residents; still on the road, not yet at home; still desiring it, not yet enjoying it."[151] Augustine appears to anticipate the anxiety such a juxtaposition might create in listeners—those who seek and hope to be commended as Mary was while worrying they are too much like Martha. Fear not, Augustine essentially responds, for you are still on the way; do not presume to attain now what is only promised you later.

As in Sermon 255, Augustine relates Mary and Martha not as opposites *per se*, but as two sides of the same coin. It is not that one is good and the other bad, or one spiritual and the other earthly in some dualistic sense. Instead, he writes, "Martha and Mary were two sisters, sisters in piety as well as by blood."[152] Both sisters are commended as those with piety—presumably piety to be emulated. Indeed, "both of them were very attached to the Lord, both happily served the Lord together." The difference is not one of quality or significance but one of temporal reality. "Martha

[151] Augustine, *Sermon 103.1*
[152] Augustine, *Sermon 103.2*

received him as travelers are normally received."[153] In offering himself to Martha as one to be fed, Jesus was already performing a kindness to her, honoring her. The same principle applies to pilgrims serving their Lord now.

Augustine continues later in the sermon to commend Martha, noting that his congregation would do well to emulate her. This move is striking in the history of preaching on this text, for one expects the preacher to encourage a congregation to be like Mary and seek the one thing necessary. Augustine, however, observes that the practices of faith appropriate to Martha's time are Martha's practices. Serve like Martha now, Augustine counsels, for you exist in a time of need. As he expressed to his congregation, "Services performed for the poor are good... I am encouraging you in their performance, and building you up in the word of God: do not be slack about welcoming the saints."[154] What Martha does for Christ in this story, the church, serving as Martha did, also does for Christ. In serving the body, one serves the head. Serving Christ as the *totus Christus* is a noble task embodied by Martha. While Mary is indeed commended as one who chose the better task, it is "not that you chose a bad one, but she chose better."[155] In fact, the only element that makes it better is the eternal reality to which Mary attends. As eternity surpasses the temporal, so the contemplation Mary embodies surpasses the work Martha personifies. The work Martha performs will pass away because it is the work of this age, the "business of exile."[156] This represents the work and toil of travelers on the way, appropriate while on the way. But one day, those who travel will arrive at their destination; those on the road will someday be home. The pilgrim's tasks will not be necessary when they arrive at their destination. In the meantime, it is the image of Martha that guides the Church in the present in order to arrive at the reality promised for their future—the reality of Mary at rest.

Sermon 104: Defending Martha's Ministry

Sermon 104 begins similarly to sermon 103 with Augustine's approval of and appreciation for Martha. He refers to Martha at this sermon's outset as a "devout woman"[157] who welcomed the Lord, leaving no sense of inferiority. After recapping the story, he addresses the question he suspects occupied his listeners' minds: Why was Martha reprimanded? Or indeed, was she reprimanded at all?

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153 Augustine, *Sermon 103.2*
154 Augustine, *Sermon 103.5*
155 Augustine, *Sermon 103.5*
156 Augustine, *Sermon 255.5*
157 Augustine, *Sermon 104.1*

No stranger to rhetorical questions in his sermons, Augustine asks, "How could she possibly be reprimanded for [her hospitality], seeing that she rejoiced in welcoming such a guest?"[158] Augustine finds the suggestion that Martha was treated sternly by Jesus—and by extension, that her work should be relegated to something unworthy and to be shunned—entirely absurd. "If that's really the case, let people all give up ministering to the needy," he responds emphatically. Augustine assumes his congregation is misappropriating the story like many contemporary devotional approaches that followed, encouraging readers to be like Mary as opposed to Martha. In response, he seeks to correct their misunderstanding. After all, he writes, "Distress calls for compassion."[159] Therefore, it cannot be that Martha is judged and found wanting; there must be another interpretation, another way of seeing and reading the story and finding themselves within it. Augustine dedicates the remainder of the sermon to this interpretive task.

Both women are "dear to the Lord, both lovely people, both disciples of his,"[160] he reminds them, thus there must be more occurring in this story than a simple call to be one or the other. The key to unlocking the difference—and thus unlocking the story—is the temporal reality each woman represents. "In these two women two kinds of life are represented: present life and future life, toilsome and restful, miserable and beatific, temporal and eternal life."[161] Martha images "things present" whereas Mary images "things to come." The imagery of exile and pilgrimage is only hinted at, but it is nonetheless present when he says of the life Martha was leading, "that's where we are," and the kind of life Mary was leading is the life toward which we are headed.

In this sermon Augustine appears to return to a theme he has employed with sufficient regularity that he expects his congregation to supply the details of what their Martha life should embody. He moves on in this sermon to spend more time expounding Mary's "one thing." With Mary functioning as the type for the future goal and future life, traveling toward that future life gives meaning and purpose to this present one. He encourages his congregation to continue a life of virtue and service, to walk in the Lord's way, so that they may arrive at their blessed rest. To encourage them in their walk, he expounds their destination.

With the image of Martha bustling about serving the Lord fresh in their minds, Augustine reminds them that someday they too will recline like Mary. Their work in the present—whether

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158 Augustine, *Sermon 104.2*
159 Augustine, *Sermon 104.3*
160 Augustine, *Sermon 104.4*
161 Augustine, *Sermon 104.4*

serving others or more generally enduring the toil and strain of daily life—is not, in the end, the end. They are on their way beyond work and toward rest. Taking the image further, Augustine notes they will not only recline with the Lord but their Lord will serve them. Quoting Luke 12:37, in which Jesus teaches his disciples about worry in the present and how to remain prepared for his departure and subsequent return, Augustine preaches, "this is the life promised us, that the Lord will make us recline, and passing along will wait on us."[162] Not only does Augustine present Martha as an image of virtue in this life; he presents her as fulfilling the role Jesus will assume on their behalf. You are busy now, Augustine tells them, but one day you will recline. You are serving the Lord and his body now, but one day he will fill you with himself such that you will hunger and thirst no longer. The bread from heaven will be served to them by him.

With this future in mind, Augustine provides shape and meaning, hope and comfort in the present to his congregation, and implores them to persist in their pilgrim journey with faithfulness, allowing their desire for rest to compel them forward. "So, beloved, I beg you, I urge you, I warn, command, implore you, let us desire that life together, let us run together toward it as we go, so that we may stop in it as a reward for our perseverance."[163] Both sisters remain the church, but in different ages. Both sisters serve their Lord, both are commendable, both are needed for the faithful to remain the noble caravan of pilgrims on their way to the one thing necessary. The story in its entirety is needed, not merely one sister or the other, for both together constitute the body of the *totus Christus*. "So there were in that house these two kinds of life, and the very fountain of life himself."[164]

For Augustine, the juxtaposition of Mary and Martha in Luke's Gospel is not primarily about which sister to emulate or even how to conduct oneself as a disciple; it is a story not of what the Church is to do, but of *when* the Church is. The sermon moves listeners to locate their identity not as either Martha or Mary, but as Martha on the way to Mary. They are a pilgrim people who travel as Martha in this life but will be Mary in the next. Thus the Church exists in two ages—what it is now and what it will one day become.

Two more sermons in particular—the aforementioned sermon on Psalm 41 [42] and another on Psalm 136 [137]—give further imaginative shape to Augustine's eschatological ecclesiology. These sermons deserve distinct attention. In each, Augustine utilizes the theological framework of

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[162] Augustine, *Sermon 104.6*
[163] Augustine, *Sermon 104.7*
[164] Augustine, *Sermon 104.4*

the *totus Christus* in service not merely of biblical interpretation and hermeneutics, but of explicating his ecclesiology. Through these psalm commentaries, Augustine demonstrates how the pilgrim motif provides the interpretive key for understanding the church's identity across time.

Expositions of the Psalms 136 [137]: The Noble Caravan of Pilgrims

In his sermon on Psalm 136, the bishop adds a unique descriptor to more common ecclesiological understandings when he addresses his congregation: "O people of God, O body of Christ, O noble caravan of pilgrims...."[165] It is this third descriptor—the church as "noble caravan of pilgrims"—that merits particular attention in understanding Augustine's ecclesiology.

Augustine demonstrates that over-realized eschatology risks producing over-realized ecclesiology. Both will, in due course, rob the Church of proper hope in the present. If the present church represents the ultimate achievement, listeners face despair. If the church proves irredeemably corrupt, little hope remains for redemption. Augustine therefore seeks to move his people's hearts and lives toward seeing themselves as the church in transit—a communal caravan. When she recognizes this reality, she will understand her present nobility even while oriented toward something greater in the future. She exists, in short, as a noble caravan of pilgrims. As Ployd observes:

> Proper participation in the Church of this world requires seeing it as a temporary reality and not the true heavenly Jerusalem to which it is journeying. Mistaking this life for the true *res* represents a loss of the virtue of hope that comes from confusion about the material and the spiritual distinction upon which the moral epistemology turns. Here Augustine connects the primary disposition of humility to this awareness. Humility keeps the proper perspective on one's self and on the sojourning life in which one lives in this world.[166]

In introducing his sermon on Psalm 136, Augustine assumes his hearers' familiarity with the two cities theme, for "every well-instructed member of holy Church ought to be familiar with the city to which we belong and of which we are citizens."[167] However, he notes, this city does not represent permanent alienation, for Christians exist "away from it on pilgrimage," and through forgiveness of sins receive a free gift enabling return to their homeland. The concept of "returning" proves critical

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[165] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.12
[166] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church,* 51.
[167] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.1

to understand, for Augustine's conception involves a homeland from which Christians originate but have never visited—a paradox central to his pilgrim ecclesiology.

The psalm begins with reference to Babylon, so Augustine immediately situates his hearers within this song; they too dwell in Babylon, for Babylon represents this present life. Without explicitly mentioning the *totus Christus*, this framework operates beneath the surface. This song belongs not only to ancient Israel but to contemporary Christians in Carthage and Hippo. Indeed, the two sing together as the body of Christ. They do not merely resemble ancient Israel; they *are* ancient Israel. They too sit by Babylon's rivers, allegorically and typologically, but grafted in as full participants. As Augustine explains, "while the centuries roll on to their end there are two cities, intermingled as to physical presence but distinct in heart."[168]

Once Augustine confirms his hearers' familiarity with this theme, he plunges more deeply into Psalm 136's depths. As he proceeds, he deepens their thematic understanding and advances them further along the path toward solid identity. He continues:

> If we truly are citizens of Jerusalem, the memory of our city is more than something to sing about; it affects the whole way in which we live our lives. In our present condition, in the confusion of this world, we do not live in Babylon as though we were citizens of it, for we are only held here as captives. Our job is not just to sing about this fact but to make it real to ourselves by the love in our hearts and our spiritual longing for our true, eternal city.[169]

Augustine emphasizes that this represents no mere image or rhetorical tool—the two cities framework and the pilgrim plight prove key to understanding Christian faith and its worldly practice. Augustine weaves the themes of transience and permanence alongside familiar motifs of being on the road versus being at home. The Church weeps as captives in Babylon because it longs for that which it does not yet possess. Babylon may appear settled, situated, and secure, but Christians know Babylon participates in time's river that flows onward, and its time will eventually end.[170] Whereas Babylon will fade and pass away through time's waters, Zion's holy city will endure and abide, and toward this city the pilgrim church makes its way.

Here occurs a great reversal, for the pilgrim church will not always remain mobile; it will one day achieve greater settlement than Babylon's apparent stability. She will possess "eternal peace,"

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168 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.1

169 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.2

170 The river of time as it flows through Babylon takes on a treacherous quality, dangerous for those tempted to settle along its banks. "Watch it flowing, look how it slides away from you and, as you see it slip away, take care lest it drag you with it." Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.3

compared to present Babylon "whose ambition is [to] enjoy a peace that is only temporal."[171] The church will not always travel the road; the caravan will one day arrive and find rest. Zion endures and abides, and the church that in this life journeys as pilgrim toward that city, moving through time and space, will also endure and abide as part of that glorious city of light.

For Augustine, the more his hearers understand their pilgrim situation, the better equipped they become to handle the various disappointments of the present. The sermon intends to move them toward enduring the present in light of the promised future. Augustine seeks to shift their identity from exclusive present-focus toward identity rooted in that future, thereby informing and shaping their present. Those disappointments, if properly understood, serve only to increase the church's longing for the heavenly city. Instead of removing their longing, he seeks to move their hearts toward kindling that longing further. Life's trials are to be more than endured. They must be seen as teachable moments in the world, fans to longing's flame that encourage the pilgrim on the journey. "Bitter experiences besprinkle our temporal life so that we may long for life eternal."[172] These bitter experiences can themselves advance the listener along the path, for longing constitutes a necessary ingredient for hope.

Augustine bookends the sermon on Psalm 136 with another veiled reference to the *totus Christus* in conjunction with his pilgrim motif by noting: "your hope has gone ahead of you and your life follows, for there we shall be with Christ. Christ is our head even now, for he guides us from on high, but then he will take us into his embrace in that city...."[173] Their hope is their head, and as the head has proceeded onward, their hope advances as well. Augustine seeks to move not only his hearers' perspectives but also their practices, so he implores his congregation to "put into practice what you have heard." One accomplishes this, he explains, by continuing to sigh in the present—a sign of dissatisfaction with this life's promises and eagerness for those delayed until the next. This sighing cultivates desire for those delayed promises. Any worldly delights require suspicious regard. Similarly, one must not lose longing and sighing for the heavenly city, as "dalliances with your lusts" can redirect focus from the road ahead. Augustine interprets Psalm 136's imprecatory elements as references to Christ and opportunities to dash desires upon the rock that is Christ. In participation with the Spirit, "Let the rock win the day."[174] This represents life aware in the present yet oriented

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171 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.1
172 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.9
173 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.22
174 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 136.22

toward the future—a life combining action and contemplation, mindful of both road and destination.

At the heart of Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology lies what Van Bavel terms "eschatological tension."[175] One must carefully maintain the tension found in Augustine's imagery, thus avoiding either over-realized or under-realized eschatological understandings of the church. While the church already reigns with the saints in heaven, she awaits final victory over her enemies, as Augustine's imagery clarifies. This tension—rather than constituting a weakness in Augustine's ecclesiology—represents its strength, providing both present meaning and future hope for the church as noble caravan of pilgrims.

Exposition of Psalm 41 [42] : The Cultivation of Holy Longing

Similar to the sighing songs along the rivers of Babylon, Augustine mentions longing at the beginning of his sermon on Psalm 41 [42]. He encourages those listening to his sermon to recognize their longing and to fan it into flame, not just for eternity, but for clarity in the present moment. That longing for understanding as listeners to a sermon will only kindle a greater, deeper, and more profound longing. "Let us love, all of us together; let us burn together with this thirst; let us run together to the fountain of understanding. Let us long for it as a hart yearns for a spring."[176]

This longing is akin to but not identical with the longing of the catechumens. Augustine begins to weave this longing for understanding into that deeper longing that he only hints at and nods toward, but a longing that finds its fulfillment only in God. This longing hints at what Grabowski calls the "gravity" of the soul "which orients it toward its last end."[177] The longing is like a compass pointed toward eternity, and to encourage that longing is to further calibrate the compass.

It is not merely the catechumens who are longing for the grace that flows from the laver of baptism, but every person present—indeed, all Christians everywhere—experience a similar holy

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[175] Van Bavel, "The Church," 175

[176] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.1

[177] Grabowski, *The Church*, 371. "By virtue of the eternal law and by the life of grace the soul is endowed with the gravity which orients it toward its last end. The charity infused into the soul of man elevates him to a plane where it can move toward a transcendent object, the highest good, in an inappropriate manner. Created to the image and likeness of God and participating in His life through grace, the soul cannot find permanent and consummate satisfaction in any good below God. And, therefore, unless the soul is permanently oriented toward God, like the needle of a compass toward the north, the equilibrium of the soul is disturbed and is not restored until it is righted through charity to God."

longing. Not only for the grace of baptism, but for what that water represents: the grace of final redemption, the renewal of all creation, that grace of which baptism is a precursor and preparation. The longing for the laver of baptism is a harbinger of the longing for the source of the spring of baptismal regeneration. This longing deepens with time and maturity. As Augustine put it:

> Run to the springs, long for the fountains of water. With God is the fountain of life, a fountain that can never dry up; and in his light is a radiance never dimmed. Long for this light; long for the well-spring, and for a light such as your eyes have never known. Your inner eye is being prepared to see that light, and your inner thirst is burning ever more fiercely for that fountain. Run to the fountain, long for the fountain…[178]

Augustine moves the hearts and lives of both the catechumens and the faithful to understand their longing will find its resolution only in God, thus paving the way for an already-but-not-yet sense of the church that the imagery of pilgrimage promotes. Lamb correctly observes that "Augustine often ties his eschatology to his ecclesiology."[179] Avoiding both an over-realized eschatology and an under-appreciation for the physical world, Lamb considers Augustine to have an "inaugurated eschatology."[180] This phrase does justice to both the temporal and eternal dimensions of Augustine's eschatology and ecclesiology and the relationship between the two as distinct, yet overlapping and interlocking.

The Church's Dual Existence: Material and Spiritual Dimensions

The Exposition of Psalm 41 highlights that for Augustine, the church exists on two planes, in two ages, and in two ways. The key within the pilgrimage framework is to distinguish between the material and the spiritual. As Augustine put it, "If he is both fountain and light he obviously is understanding, for while he fully satisfies the soul athirst to know, everyone who understands is illumined by a light that is not corporeal or carnal or external, but is an inward radiance. There is an interior light, brothers and sisters, which people without understanding do not know."[181] Yet the two are distinct but not in opposition to one another, for the longing common to humanity is, as he related at the outset of his sermon, not just a longing for an interior knowledge but for an exterior reality. In other words, we long both for an internal illumination and also for an external renewal

[178] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.2
[179] Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope,* 172.
[180] Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope,* 173.
[181] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm*s 41.2

that will set our sighs and longings to cease. Ployd notes this dynamic at work in Augustine when he writes,

> This exercise in training the mind to distinguish between the material and the spiritual also lies at the heart of Augustine's preaching on the church in these sermons… Augustine interprets the Jerusalem to which the psalmist climbs in the Psalms of Ascent as indicative of the eternal reality to which Christians are ascending and from which they are on sojourn in this life. This Jerusalem is, in short, heaven, but Augustine makes clear that this heavenly city is connected to our experience of the church.[182]

Augustine does indeed want his congregation to learn to distinguish between the material and the spiritual, but not in terms of diminishing one in order to elevate the other. Instead, Augustine is keen to train the minds of his congregants to be able to move beyond the material, yet not abandon it. The material world, in Augustine's sacramental understanding, is charged with the glory of God and points beyond itself to the spiritual world. So too, then, the earthly city of Jerusalem, both as a physical city but also as an image for the earthly church, has something in it that points beyond itself. If it did not, it would not be a sign at all, just a thing.

As Cameron notes, "For Augustine the vision of God was the goal of all human striving, but he turned the Plotinian scenario on its head by maintaining that mystical union might be achieved by faith in the incarnation, before worthiness is established."[183] So too, his ecclesiology is turned on its head—it is neither exclusively present nor exclusively future, but both, simultaneously. Even to say the church exists in two ages is in some sense to miss the "inaugurated eschatology" Augustine is working with in his ecclesiology.[184] Two ages exist, but only one church moves through them. Or as Grabowski evocatively put it, "The eternal Church is a prolongation of the temporal Church…"[185] The noble caravan of pilgrims constitutes one church prolonged through two ages.

The Corporate Nature of the Pilgrim Journey

That the church is on pilgrimage—and not just individual souls collected together in any particular cathedral—is a central component to Augustine's understanding of the Christian faith writ large. His is no solitary understanding of the Christian life and faith; to be a Christian is to be in the church.

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[182] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church*, 34.
[183] Cameron, "Totus Christus", 64.
[184] Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 173.
[185] Grabowski, *The Church*, 578.

He uses the image of deer walking together in Psalm 41 to illustrate his point. "It is said, then, that when deer are walking in single file, or want to swim to a different place to find fresh grazing, they rest their heavy heads on each other."[186] While he doesn't seem to have direct knowledge of whether this is in fact the case with deer, for his sermonic purposes, it doesn't particularly matter. The notion that Augustine has in mind, and that to which deer walking together is a useful image, is of the church as a community of people who bear one another's burdens. As deer move in packs, so Augustine seeks to move the hearts of his people, but also to move them along the path in their journey together. Baptism into Christ is a baptism into death, but a death of self that brings life to the other, or further still, brings life to the community. As deer travel together to make walking easier, so individuals traverse through life together as the church. Going it alone means finding the wrong path, or worse, perishing along the way.

As the sermon continues, someone in the congregation appears to ask an audible question. Whether tongue-in-cheek or genuine, the questioner seems to be asking if the deer are really thirsty or need a bath. Augustine takes the opportunity to further expound the language of thirst and longing. He ties both together with the language of pilgrimage: "This is what I am thirsting for, to reach him and to appear before him. I am thirsty on my pilgrimage, parched in my running, but I will be totally satisfied when I arrive. But when shall I reach him? What is soon to God seems late to our longing."[187]

The Tent of God: Temporal Dwelling of the Pilgrim Church

Within his sermon on Psalm 41, Augustine moves from the longing common on the pilgrim journey to becoming more explicit about that journey. He concludes a section on verse 3 of the psalm, the lingering question of "Where is your God?" with a transitional thought that will guide him into a discussion on the pilgrim journey:

> Yet still I have pondered on this search for my God and, longing to gaze on the invisible realities of God by understanding them through created things, I poured out my soul above myself; and now there is nothing left for me to touch, except my God. For there, above my soul, is the home of my God; there he dwells, from there he looks down upon me, from there he created me, from there he governs me and takes thought for me, from there he

[186] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.2
[187] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.5

> arouses me, calls me, guides me and leads me on, and from there he will lead me to journey's end.[188]

Verse 4 will further charge his exposition of the church on pilgrimage:

These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.[189]

Here at verse 4, Augustine introduces an evocative descriptor of the pilgrim church - the tent of God on earth. Pilgrims are those who are in the tent of God now, yet on their way to a more permanent home in the future. "For he who has his most lofty home in a secret place has also a tent on earth. His tent is the Church, the Church which is still a pilgrim; yet he is to be sought there, because in this tent we find the way that leads to his home."[190] He has used this metaphor before in a sermon on Psalm 26 [27], which we will turn to shortly. There, Augustine reminds his congregation—as he does in his sermon on Psalm 41—that first, they are people on the way. But second, they are well along the way. In other words, the singers of this song already know toward that which they are tending, and can sing of the one thing they long for.

The "one thing" echoes his sermons on Mary and Martha, where the one thing is the rest that Mary has chosen for herself, and the rest Martha will one day enjoy. Unlike the section of Psalm 41 aimed at the catechumens, in his sermon on Psalm 26 Augustine is clearly talking to the faithful, those who already know where their pilgrimage is tending. Augustine carefully notes that to live in the Lord's house, and thus "the place where we will abide forever is called a house or a home,"[191] though they are not yet to this home. They are people on the way. Before we return to a close reading of Psalm 41, we consider a brief excursus into Augustine's sermon on Psalm 26 which will, in due course, broaden our understanding the pilgrim ecclesiology on display in his sermon on Psalm 41.

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[188] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.8
[189] Psalm 42:4.
[190] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.9
[191] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.4

Excursus: Psalm 26 and Soldiers on Campaign

What later theologians will refer to as the church militant, Augustine anticipates with language of soldiers on campaign. As we have seen, Augustine understands the church existing within both the temporal and eternal realms as the two lives of the church. While we long for a final home, and indeed are on the way toward the house of the Lord, Augustine develops this further: "Our dwelling while we are pilgrimage is sometimes referred to as a house, but is more correctly called a tent."[192] He then describes his congregation as *contubernales*, "tent companions," the word given to active soldiers who are away from home, those "who are on the move…engaged in some kind of military service."[193] This is the sort of life you live now, Augustine tells his congregation; you are those who are in the service of the Lord, enlisted as active soldiers in the battle of faith, dwelling in tents together in this life, yet longing for and looking forward to peace and rest. As Ployd puts it,

> The heavenly Jerusalem is the church insofar as the church is already perfected in glory. The earthly church has a teleological identity tied to this heavenly Jerusalem because it is the goal that defines the sojourning life of the church militant. Proper understanding of the church requires recognizing its orientation to this heavenly Jerusalem. The image of the soldiers on campaign suggests the hope and promise of returning home, where home is that eternal Jerusalem. The soldier's life of tent-dwelling is a temporary existence that finds its meaning in the homeland from which he is temporarily estranged.[194]

Meanwhile, the church does battle in the night, longing for victory in the morning. In both his sermon on Psalm 41 and on Psalm 26, Augustine speaks evocatively of that longing, crying out "for a beauty not seen as yet," while simultaneously cultivating that same longing. Longing, for Augustine, is key to the Christian life, and his sermons move the hearts of his listeners to cultivate that longing. "Let your heart stretch beyond all familiar things."[195] Stretch beyond the tent, beyond the battle, beyond the war and the pilgrimage, and let it stretch all the way to home. This stretching of the heart, this movement, beckons the one longing forward on the path, onward into battle. True and ultimate safety is only found in the house of the Lord, once the battle is completed. Yet one can safely trust the guidance of God in the tent along the way.

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[192] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.4
[193] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.4
[194] Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church,* 35.
[195] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.4

While there is a certain degree of safety in the tent, Augustine tempers the expectations of his congregation, reminding them of what they already know: "this present life is the time of trouble" as "our enemies can still rage against us." Augustine's preaching is aimed moving the congregation along on the pilgrim way, safely in the tent but always forward, always onward. This is why the church continues to groan, that which is "proper to people in misery."[196] The church groans and prays now while engaged in battle, weeping for its losses, petitioning God for an end to the darkness of war, knowing that the light of peace lies ahead.

Even in the midst of battle, however, the church on pilgrimage need not fear, for though it "has not yet been raised up above its enemies,"[197] the head has already conquered and has been raised above. Augustine moves back and forth from the temporal to the eternal, and while Martha and Mary are not mentioned, the motif of one church in two ages is in view. This is a sermon of comfort and hope, an encouragement to continue the battle, to continue walking, while longing for the rest to which they are headed, but to persevere until the church reaches the repose of conquest. Therefore, Augustine concludes his sermon, the church on pilgrimage must persevere to the end, "holding out for the Lord," for while "we are still plodding along and have not yet finished our pilgrimage, he defers what he has promised, but not to deprive us of it."[198] This excursus into Psalm 26 enlarges and further develops how we appreciate a similar theme in Psalm 41.

Worship as Foretaste: Hearing the Eternal Festival

While his sermon on Psalm 26 fills out the pilgrim church at war, returning to his sermon on Psalm 41, Augustine sees the psalms in general and Psalm 41 in particular as the songs of soldiers who cheer themselves in the midst of battle. Following the chanting of the psalm before his sermon, Augustine hints that the music of the congregation, like the psalms and sacraments, point beyond themselves. What awaits the pilgrim on their way to the house of God is an "everlasting party" where the "choirs of angels keep eternal festival"—a "feast day that does not open at dawn or close at sundown." As a pilgrim in the tent on earth, in other words, as a worshiper listening to his sermon at the very moment, one can hear the echoes and whispers of the festival that awaits them.

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[196] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.7
[197] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.6
[198] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 26.14

Augustine mixes his metaphors, bringing the listener back to the deer at the beginning of the psalm, a deer who hears the music of the spheres, and is drawn by the sound toward the living water.

> From that eternal, unfading festival melodious and delightful sound reaches the ears of the heart, but only if the world's din does not drown it. The sweet strains of that celebration are wafted into the ears of one who walks in the tent and ponders the wonderful works of God in the redemption of believers, and they drag the deer toward the springs of water.[199]

The tent is not just for war, but for praise; not merely for battle, but for worship. Augustine urges his congregation as the tent on earth to remain within that tent, moving forward with it, as it, and in it. For it is there in the tent they can hear the echoes of a divine festival as surely as they participate in worship themselves. In the choral music of Hippo or Carthage it is as if the congregation hears the faint sounds of the angel chorus in the eternal temple of God. Whatever sounds are heard in a local cathedral, they are whispers pointing beyond themselves to the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem, beckoning the listener forward where unending praise is heard. Hearing the sounds of the home to which they are making their way, the worshiper is caught up now in the praise of eternity. The beauty of any music they hear that Sunday is but a foretaste of the beauty that is to come, but it is a taste indeed for those who are trained to hear it.

Formation Through Beauty: Aesthetic and Moral Transformation

Sarah Stewart-Kroeker correctly sees in this metaphor more than just a sense of aesthetic beauty, rather one that strains toward moral beauty as well. This is preaching designed to move affection and application, hearts and habits. "And just as formation happens through attraction to the beautiful Christ, so too formation happens through attraction to the church, its members, and its practices."[200] Beauty and attraction are not tangential, but central, as Stewart-Kroeker helpfully notes. The melodious sounds are both the worship of the church, as well as the sweet sounds of its virtue.

Thus Augustine continues that the training in that melody comes with a warning to stay the course. Even as those who may "come within earshot of that melody," yet are still those who are "under the weight of our weakness." Augustine is compelled to remind his congregation to continue to strive, keep walking, keep yearning, keep moving, and be like the deer who pants for the living

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[199] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.9
[200] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation,* 164.

God, never satisfied until they reach home. Such yearning is inevitable. "As we have found there a cause for joy, so here there is no shortage of things to groan about."[201]

A key part of the training while in the tent—training the soul to thirst after God, the ears to pick up the melody of the angel choir, the eye to see the light that shines—is prayer.[202] Augustine asks his congregation, "What must you do then, while you are on your pilgrimage? How must you conduct yourself?"[203] The answer to his query, whether his congregation was able to spot it or not, was within the psalm as his sermon text, and is in fact the psalms themselves. As Stewart-Kroeker observes,

> Similarly in the church, the fledgling pilgrim must learn how to speak and understand the speech of a new community, must learn its stories and its history, must learn how to participate in its sacraments which involves eating and drinking, how to sing its music, and most importantly, how to engage its other members lovingly. This formation and speech is simultaneously a formation in aesthetics.[204]

For Stewart-Kroeker, the formation of the church is a formation of ethics or morals, and of aesthetics. The "fledgling pilgrim" not only learns to speak the language of the Bible with the cadence of the Spirit, but how to recognize that which truly is Good and True and especially, Beautiful.

Augustine sweeps up all the metaphors and imagery he has been using as well as those found within the psalm itself when he arrives in his exposition at verse 8:

By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.[205]

What must you do, he asks, and answers from within the psalm: "My prayer to God of my life is within me." Tying the threads together, Augustine weaves them all in one sentence of exposition: "This is what I do, I, a thirsty deer, longing for the springs of water, remembering the sweetness of the sound that has led me through the tent, even to God's house."[206] The pilgrim traveler is the deer who pants for the Lord, longing for the home of final rest, drawn by the sweet

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[201] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.10
[202] We turn to prayer more fully in chapter 3.
[203] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.17
[204] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 171.
[205] Psalm 42:8
[206] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.17

sound of eternal praise that wafts down to the tent of the church on earth, who prays to God. Prayer is both the expressed longing of the soul for God and the training of that soul, for prayer reminds the one praying that the promises of God are delayed, not disavowed.

As Stewart-Kroeker summarizes this sermon, "As believers travel in the tent, they hear the wafting celebratory strains that draw them along the way as deer to springs of water. The Church offers a foretaste of the heavenly party. The church, like Christ, draws people in by appealing to their aesthetic senses."[207] Not merely beauty as a separate category, but, as Stewart-Kroeker put it earlier, the beautiful Christ. It is, in short, not aesthetics per se, but an attraction to Christ.

Similarly, Stewart-Kroeker notes that the movement of the pilgrim is both "inner and outward." She writes,

> The relationship between God and humanity is founded on the inner and outward movement of the whole human being in community toward the eternal home. Human beings must be purified and have their hearts turned to God. To accomplish this, Christ becomes visible in the incarnation, sacrifices himself for humanity in self-giving love, and promises redemption in his resurrection.[208]

Throughout this sermon it is this future orientation of the pilgrim that guides the exposition, giving meaning and filling out the longing at the heart of the psalm. The longing described in this sermon is nothing less than the longing for the divine, a longing present in the *sensus divinitas*, quenched only when we arrive in the holy city and the beatific vision is before our eyes. Our eyes, no less than our hearts, are themselves being prepared on the pilgrim journey. All eyes are able to take in the beauty of creation from sky to sea, but the eyes that are trained with longing on that far horizon are able to move from delight in creation to delight in the Creator. It is the journey that will, if we let it, train our eyes in such ways, to see the One who looks down and sees us, though now we see by faith, then by sight.

Conclusion

Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology, as found in certain key sermons, serves as the fundamental framework through which he moves his listeners to view themselves as the noble caravan—the Body of Christ journeying corporately through this life toward the next. This study has argued that

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[207] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 175.
[208] Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 175.

the pilgrim motif deserves pride of place in understanding Augustine's ecclesiology, not merely as one rhetorical device among others, but as the organizing principle that provides coherence to his otherwise dispersed ecclesiological reflections.

Augustine employs this pilgrimage imagery as both descriptive of the Church's essential nature and prescriptive for its life together. His sermons are descriptive of the church ontologically as this noble caravan of pilgrims existing within a temporal frame while journeying toward an eternal one. The church lives simultaneously in two ages—the present age of groaning and longing, and the eternal age toward which it travels as one unified body. This "inaugurated eschatology," as Lamb aptly terms it, captures Augustine's vision of one church prolonged through two ages rather than two separate ecclesiologies.

This pilgrim imagery is equally prescriptive for the moral, practical, and aesthetic dimensions of the church's present life. It is precisely in describing the church as pilgrims on the way—who must therefore act appropriately to that status—that Augustine's ecclesiology comes into clearest focus. Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology thus provides both theological foundation and pastoral guidance. It offers his congregations a compelling vision of their corporate identity that spans the temporal and eternal, while simultaneously calling them to practices—prayer, worship, mutual care, and aesthetic formation—that befit their status as the noble caravan of Christ. In this way, the pilgrim motif proves central not merely as one metaphor among others, but as the organizing principle through which Augustine's entire understanding of the church takes shape. The church is not simply like a caravan of pilgrims; it *is* the noble caravan, the Body of Christ journeying toward its eternal home while dwelling faithfully in the tent of God along the way.

The Hermeneutical Priority of the Pilgrim Motif

The textual analysis has demonstrated that Augustine consistently returns to pilgrim imagery across diverse scriptural texts and varied sermonic contexts. Whether expositing psalms, gospel narratives, or liturgical seasons, Augustine discerns the same fundamental reality: the church as noble caravan of pilgrims. This consistency suggests that the pilgrim motif functions not merely as useful metaphor but as hermeneutical key for understanding both Scripture and the church's contemporary situation.

The temporal sophistication of Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology deserves particular recognition. His vision of the church existing in "time in between" avoids both the Scylla of over-realized eschatology and the Charybdis of purely futuristic hope. The church lives fully in the

present while being oriented entirely toward the future. This temporal dialectic enables Augustine to maintain the tension that van Bavel identifies as central to his ecclesiological vision while providing practical guidance for congregational life.

Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology proves fundamentally formative rather than merely informative. His sermons aim not simply to convey information about the church but to transform congregational identity. The aesthetic dimension of this formation—through liturgical beauty, psalmody, and sacramental participation—reflects Augustine's understanding that the church is drawn forward by attraction to the beautiful Christ rather than driven forward by moral obligation alone.

The "ecclesiology of groaning" that McCarthy identifies finds its proper theological context within the pilgrim framework. The church groans not from despair but from longing—the cry of those who know their destination and strain forward toward it. This groaning represents not weakness but strength, not complaint but hope expressed through honest acknowledgment of present incompleteness.

3.

Prayer as Pilgrim Practice

In 412, the wealthy Roman noblewoman Anicia Faltonia Proba wrote to the Bishop of Hippo with pressing questions about Christian prayer. Having converted to Christianity and cultivated friendships with Augustine and other influential fifth-century church leaders, Proba sought theological guidance on a fundamental aspect of Christian practice. Her letter conveyed a central anxiety: How ought Christians to pray? Augustine's responding letter laid out essential principles of prayer, offering both practical guidance and theological foundation. This correspondence, known as Letter 130, represents one of Augustine's most direct expositions on prayer, as he never composed a formal treatise on the subject.[209]

However, had Proba been a regular congregant at Augustine's Hippo, she would have encountered the bishop's regular and enthusiastic preaching on prayer. Augustine's sermons, particularly his homilies on the Psalms, constitute a vital—and often overlooked—resource for understanding his theology and practice of prayer. These sermonic treatments reveal that Augustine's approach to prayer cannot be separated from his broader theological framework of Christian existence as pilgrimage.

This chapter argues that Augustine's understanding of prayer is fundamentally shaped by his conception of the Christian life as pilgrimage. Prayer is, in Augustine's memorable phrase, to "heave pilgrim's sighs."[210] Prayer functions as a quintessential pilgrim practice—a form of spiritual speech that emerges from and sustains the believer's journey through this present age to the age to come, from mortality to immortality, from earth to heaven, and ultimately from self to God. Prayer is both the native language of the pilgrim, as well as a key means of moving souls along the pilgrim journey. Augustine's instruction to Proba encapsulates this framework: before one can know how to pray or what to pray for, one must first recognize one's situation as a pilgrim making passage through this life toward the next. Only when Christians understand themselves as pilgrims - contingent,

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[209] Augustine, *Epistulae* 130 (Letter to Proba). For the historical context of this correspondence, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 340-342.

[210] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.11

dependent, and vulnerable beings journeying toward their ultimate destination - can authentic prayer emerge.

Augustine's conceptual framework for prayer emerges from his understanding of the Christian's liminal existence between the *already* and *not yet* of salvation history. Drawing extensively from Pauline theology, particularly 2 Corinthians 5:6 ("while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord"), Augustine consistently interprets Christian existence as a state of productive tension between present reality and eschatological fulfillment. This tension provides the essential context for understanding prayer's function and purpose.

After a thematic exploration of prayer, including an engagement with secondary literature, we will turn to a close reading of two of Augustine's sermons that develop this thematic investigation. Using Augustine's sermons on Psalms 37 and 85 as primary sources, this chapter demonstrates how Augustine situates prayer as an essential practice within the Christian's temporal journey toward eternity. Prayer as pilgrim speech contextualizes seemingly disparate aspects of prayer while drawing together complex elements within Augustine's broader theological framework. This perspective illuminates not only the various functions Augustine assigns to prayer but also resolves apparent tensions in his theological anthropology between divine initiative and human response, between present experience and eschatological hope.

Augustine's understanding of prayer reveals a fundamentally reciprocal dynamic: as prayer is poured out, the one praying is filled. Prayer both expresses and enflames desire; it functions as memory while simultaneously serving as a practice of remembrance; it embodies hope while cultivating hope; it requires patience while encouraging patience. In essence, prayer operates as a reciprocal practice that reinforces what it requires and replenishes what it expends.

This reciprocal character of prayer reflects its unique position within Augustine's pilgrimage theology. Prayer belongs distinctly to this present life, yet like the Christian pilgrim, it will undergo transformation in the eschaton. Augustine's sermons reveal prayer not merely as a spiritual discipline practiced during pilgrimage, but as the characteristic speech of pilgrimage itself—the verbal expression of the soul's movement toward its ultimate destination in God.

Heaving Pilgrim Sighs

Augustine's conception of prayer as pilgrim speech finds its most evocative expression in his understanding of prayer as "heaving pilgrim's sighs." This metaphor, drawn from his sermon on Psalm 85, encapsulates the essential character of Christian prayer as the native tongue of those journeying toward their eternal destination. In this sermon, Augustine establishes prayer not merely as one practice among many, but as the practice *par excellence* that marks Christian identity itself: "What must you do, then, while you are on your pilgrimage? How must you conduct yourself? My prayer to the God of my life is within me... As long as my corruptible body weighs heavily on my soul my prayer to the God of my life is within me."[211]

The sigh of the pilgrim expresses, fundamentally, the longing of one journeying toward their ultimate destination but not yet at home. While temporal benefits represent the most obvious associations with petitionary prayer, Augustine locates prayer's heart in the pilgrim's deepest desire—indeed, in desire itself. As he articulates in his exposition of the psalms:

> Eternal benefits…are first and foremost eternal life itself, the imperishability and immortality of flesh and soul, the company of angels, the heavenly city, unfailing titles of nobility, a Father and a fatherland, the one beyond death, the other beyond enemies. We should be longing for these benefits with infinite desire, pray for them with tireless perseverance, not with long speeches but with the evidence of our sighs. *Desire is praying always, even if the tongue is silent. If you desire always, you are praying always.* When does prayer nod off to sleep? When desire grows cold.[212]

This understanding of desire as prayer itself reveals Augustine's profound insight into the relationship between human longing and divine orientation. The significance of "sighs" (*gemitus*) in Augustine's prayer theology cannot be overstated. These sighs represent the inarticulate longing of the human heart for its ultimate fulfillment in God—a longing that constitutes prayer in its most essential form. The Christian heart's anguish stems from "not yet living with Christ" and from "being a pilgrim still, and longing for our homeland."[213] Such longing constitutes authentic prayer even when unexpressed verbally, for it represents the soul's fundamental orientation toward God. Prayer is pilgrim speech which "eternity has wrung" from the one praying "and launched it on its way to" to God.[214]

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[211] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.11

[212] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 80.7, emphasis mine

[213] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 122.2

[214] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 53.5, "Let my prayer reach you. My longing for the joys you will lavish upon us in eternity has wrung this prayer from me and launched it on its way to you. I am directing it to your ears. Help it to speed true; do not let it falter and fall limply short of its mark."

Prayer and the Ordering of Desire

Augustine's pastoral sensitivity emerges in his careful instruction regarding temporal versus eternal petitions. He does not condemn prayers for immediate needs but insists they must be properly ordered within the pilgrim's ultimate trajectory. When situated as pilgrim prayers, temporal requests find their appropriate place as provisions for the journey rather than destinations in themselves. While Augustine acknowledges the legitimacy of petitions for temporal needs, he consistently subordinates these within an eschatological hierarchy. The pilgrim's primary desire remains God himself, and this fundamental orientation shapes all subsidiary prayers.

This theological framework leads Augustine to counsel against overly specific temporal requests. "As far as temporal benefits are concerned, brothers and sisters, we advise you, we exhort you in the Lord's name, to ask not for some definite gift but simply for what God knows will be expedient for you."[215] This counsel stems not from divine arbitrariness but from the recognition that God understands the pilgrim's needs better than the pilgrim herself. Augustine employs a favored metaphor of the divine as physician: "Trust the doctor. What he has prescribed is painful, but useful; it hurts, but it heals. See how it ends, and be glad about what was denied you, and realize what was supplied you."[216]

This medical metaphor serves multiple theological functions. First, it preserves human agency in prayer while acknowledging divine sovereignty in response. Second, it provides a framework for understanding apparently unanswered prayers not as divine neglect but as divine wisdom. Third, it situates temporal sufferings within a larger narrative of spiritual healing and growth.

Crucially, Augustine's framework does not denigrate temporal concerns but properly locates them within the pilgrim journey. Temporal needs are legitimate precisely because pilgrims require sustenance for their journey. The key insight is that these needs must be situated within the larger narrative of movement toward the eternal city.

Prayer as the Practice of Patience

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[215] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm,* 53.5
[216] Augustine, *Sermon 61A.4*

The pilgrim's relationship to God through prayer necessarily involves forbearance—what might be termed "hopeful patience" that bridges the chasm between time and eternity.[217] Augustine's understanding of prayer as patience emerges from the temporal character of pilgrimage itself. The pilgrim prays from within time toward eternity, from mortality toward immortality, creating an inevitable tension that patience must navigate.

However, Augustine's emphasis on patience must be understood within his eschatological framework rather than as mere resignation to temporal existence. The patience cultivated through prayer is specifically pilgrim patience—patience oriented toward a definite destination. As Augustine notes regarding prayers for eternal life: "Yet if he or she prays to attain eternal life, that prayer is heard, always."[218] The certainty of this ultimate petition being granted provides the foundation for patient trust regarding temporal requests.

The Eschatological Guarantee

Augustine's treatment of prayer reveals his ongoing theological work of reconciling the "already" and "not yet" of Christian existence. The resurrection of Christ has fundamentally altered reality's structure, yet pilgrims continue their journey through time toward eternity. Prayer becomes the practice through which this tension is both expressed and navigated. While temporal prayers may receive answers that surprise or even disappoint, the prayer for God himself carries an eschatological guarantee.

This guarantee, however, operates according to divine rather than human timing: "If you do not get it at once, that is because the time has not come yet. You are heard, though you do not know it; your petition is being taken care of, though you do not know where or how. The answer is present in the root, though the fruit does not show yet."[219] Augustine's organic metaphor suggests that divine responses to prayer follow developmental patterns that transcend immediate temporal satisfaction while remaining grounded in God's faithful commitment to the pilgrim's ultimate arrival.

Prayer as Fanned Fire: The Reciprocal Dynamic

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[217] Teubner, *Prayer after Augustine*, 24.
[218] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm*, 59.7
[219] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm,* 59.7

Augustine's understanding of prayer reveals a fundamental reciprocal dynamic that distinguishes his approach from other purely petitionary models of prayer. Prayer operates according to what might be termed a "fanned fire" principle: as pilgrims pour out prayer, they are simultaneously filled with that for which they pray. This reciprocal nature means that prayer reinforces what it requires and replenishes what it expends, creating a self-sustaining spiritual practice uniquely suited to the pilgrim's journey. This principle operates across multiple dimensions of the spiritual life and reflects Augustine's broader theological commitment to understanding divine-human cooperation in non-competitive terms.

The metaphor of fanned fire captures Augustine's insight into how apparent divine delays intensify rather than diminish authentic prayer. "The prayer of the saints seems to be rejected as the great gifts they hope for are deferred and tribulations beset them; but this is only to kindle their prayer into a hotter flame, like a fire fanned by a gust of air."[220] Rather than discouraging the pilgrim, unanswered prayers serve to deepen desire and strengthen the very capacity for prayer itself. Augustine describes this dynamic in his commentary on Psalm 118: "a longing that is both articulated and further stretched by this prayer."[221] Seen this way, the longing of the pilgrim for their homeland, for the rest they seek, for God, is only increased in prayer, not satiated.

The Eschatological Dimension of Reciprocal Prayer

This reciprocal character of prayer finds its theological foundation in Augustine's eschatological framework. The pilgrim prays from within the tension between the "already" and "not yet" of Christian existence, and this temporal location shapes prayer's reciprocal nature. Augustine explains: "There are many who invoke him, but not in truth; they seek something from him but do not seek God himself. Do you seek nothing further? Be hungry and knock on the householder's door; he still has more to give you."[222] This too, functions for Augustine as both descriptive of the function of prayer, and also prescriptive of practice of it.[223] One prays from their desire, for desire; from their longing, for a further longing. One prays not just for the things of this world, but of the things to come, and in so doing, enkindles the longing for eternity that resides deep within.

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[220] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 87.14
[221] Augustine, *Exposition 15 of Psalm* 118.1
[222] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm*, 144.22
[223]" So learn, friends, to ask for a good that is, if I may so put it, good-making; that is, a good that makes people good." Augustine, *Sermon* 105.2

The eschatological horizon prevents prayer from becoming merely therapeutic or self-contained. Instead, it orients the pilgrim toward an ever-expanding desire for God that cannot be satisfied within temporal existence. Augustine acknowledges this perpetual longing: "But as long as we are in this world we must entreat God not to take away from us either our prayer or his mercy; that is, we must ask that we may perseveringly pray and he may perseveringly have mercy on us."[224]

Prayer and Pilgrim Identity

The recognition of oneself as a pilgrim naturally encourages the practice of prayer. Augustine locates his congregation within salvation history: "if we understand we shall see that where we live now is a place not for gladness but for groaning, not yet a place for exultation but still a place for lamentation. Even if a certain exultation is habitually present in our hearts, it is the joy of hope, not of fulfillment."[225] This temporal location—situated after Christ's resurrection but before his return—creates the existential condition that makes prayer both necessary and natural.

Augustine's pastoral insight recognizes that congregants might struggle with this perpetual longing. He addresses potential concerns about remaining unsatisfied despite professing resurrection joy: "As long as we are still on pilgrimage here, what we shall be cannot be told. And perhaps even here, when we lift up our hands, we long for that ultimate satiety; we long for that state where we shall be so totally satisfied with God's lavish gifts that all our needs will vanish utterly."[226]

Faith as Prayer's Foundation and Fruit

The reciprocal dynamic of prayer finds its clearest expression in Augustine's treatment of the relationship between faith and prayer. "Faith is the fountainhead of prayer," Augustine observes, "and if faith falters, prayer perishes." Yet the pastoral Augustine refuses to leave this relationship as merely unidirectional. "So in order to pray, let us believe; and in order that the very faith by which

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[224] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm,* 65.24

[225] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 54.3. "We rejoice over God's promise, because we know that he who promises does not deceive us. But as far as the present time is concerned, listen to what a bad situation and what straits we are in. If you are keeping to the path, what you hear will find an echo in your own experience."

[226] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 62.14

we pray may not fail, let us pray. Faith pours out prayer, prayer being poured out obtains firmness for faith."[227]

This formulation echoes Augustine's frequent sermonic use of Isaiah 7:9 ("unless you believe, you will not understand"), but here he emphasizes prayer's role in strengthening the very faith that makes prayer possible.[228] The pouring out of prayer does not exhaust the supply but increases it, creating a sustainable spiritual practice for the pilgrim's journey. As Augustine notes in Sermon 115, even "the desire of this audience to understand all this is a prayer in itself... prayer leads to understanding."[229]

Augustine even admits at one point that the reciprocal loop will not be cut even in eternity, for the sight of God will only produce in those who see him the longing to continue. The presence of God will not satisfy in the sense of being full and thus complete, for the love of God will enlarge the hearts of those united to him such that they expand like the universe.[230]

Augustine's emphasis extends beyond generic prayer to specific forms—particularly the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms. It is to his understanding of the Psalter as the songs of the pilgrim that we now turn.

Augustine and the Psalms: Scripture's Heart in Pilgrimage

Augustine's relationship with the Psalter provides crucial insight into his understanding of prayer as a pilgrim practice. His famous opening to the *Confessions* — "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite"[231]— draws directly from Psalm 48: "Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain." This opening

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[227] Augustine, *Sermon* 115.1

[228] See Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 8.6; *Exposition* 18 of Psalm 118.3; Homilies on John 27.7; 29.6; 45.7; 69.2; and sermons 43.7; 89.4; 91.9; 118.1; 126.1; 139.1; 140.6; 212.1; 229; 272.

[229] Anthony Dupont, "The Prayer Theme in Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Sermons," *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011): 387

[230] "…there's nothing greater than God; don't worry, all the same, about not having enough room; receive him, and he enlarges your living space." Sermon 53A.11. So too, in his sermon on Psalm 146.12, Augustine writes of persevering in seeking wisdom and truth in the Scriptures, hinting that prayer works the same way. "As you persevere in knocking you will be stretched; as you are stretched, your capacity will be enlarged; as your capacity grows, you will receive what comes to you as gift." Also, "your God, when he comes in, will himself widen and enlarge you." As in *Sermon* 177.4.

[231] *Confessions* I.1.i

gesture reveals more than literary flourish; it demonstrates how thoroughly the Psalms shaped Augustine's theological imagination and spiritual vocabulary.

For nearly thirty years, Augustine preached continuously on the Psalms, considering his homilies a running commentary that he intended to edit into systematic form. Even when preaching on other biblical texts, Augustine consistently wove psalmic references throughout his sermons, occasionally challenging his congregation to complete familiar verses extemporaneously.[232] He preached from the psalms and included the psalms in every sermon. He began his Christian life with them after his conversion, he began his ministry with them after his ordination, and he ended his life with them in his final hours.[233] They constituted not merely a fascination but the interpretive key to understanding both Scripture and the Christian's place within salvation history.

Patristic Context and Augustine's Innovation

Augustine inherited a rich tradition of psalmic interpretation. His mentor Ambrose had memorably referred to the psalms as a "gymnasium for the soul." In his commentary on the Psalms, Ambrose wrote, "In the Book of Psalms there is profit for all, with healing power for our salvation... All who read it may find the cure for their own individual failings. All with eyes to see can discover in it a complete gymnasium for the soul, a stadium for all the virtues."[234] Similarly, Athanasius characterized the Psalter as "a guide for all the movements of your soul."[235]

Augustine, however, moved beyond understanding the Psalms as merely therapeutic or devotional. As Michael Cameron observes, Augustine represents the "undisputed high-point in patristic interpretation of the psalms"[236] because he discovered in them not only what befits the individual soul, but what illuminates the entirety of Scripture and the Christian's location within

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[232] For example, in his *Exposition of Psalm* 85.18, "Ah, you are responding already! I can hear the murmuring from those who know their scriptures well. May God, who has written his word in your hearts, make it effective in your actions. You know, brothers and sisters, that those who tell you you are happy are deceiving you."

[233] Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 166. Cameron notes: "The Book of Psalms surfaces at crucial moments in Augustine's life."

[234] Ambrose, *Commentary on Psalm* 1:4,8

[235] Athanasius, "Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," in *Athanasius: On the Incarnation*, trans. Anonymous (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998).

[236] Michael Fiedrowicz, "Introductory Essay," in *Exposition of Psalm 1–32*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 15 (New City Press, 2000), 18.

redemptive history. Through wrestling with the Psalms after his ordination, Augustine matured as expositor, theologian, and Christian. Cameron notes that "The Psalms became a mirror in which Augustine examined his soul, a lens through which he examined Old Testament prophecies of Christ, and indeed a prism through which he read the entire bible."[237] As he preaches through the psalter, Augustine has his own eyes of faith shaped, in preparation to shape the sight of others.

The Psalms as Scripture's Microcosm

Augustine's homiletical engagement with the Psalter transformed his relationship with Scripture from teacher to fellow learner alongside his congregation. "What I live on is what I utter to you; what I'm fed on is what I serve up to you,"[238] he declared, revealing how the Psalms nourished his own spiritual life through the very act of exposition. This reciprocal dynamic—where teaching simultaneously feeds the teacher—reflects the same principle Augustine identified in prayer. So too in Christ, the Scriptures become, for those listening to an Augustinian sermon, their story; heaven becomes their city, and the pilgrim path their journey.

Augustine's distinctive contribution lies in recognizing the Psalms as Scripture's microcosm that provides the hermeneutical key for understanding both biblical revelation and Christian existence. As he preached, "Everything written here is like a mirror held up to us," referring both to the Psalms specifically and Scripture generally.[239] Through the Psalter, Augustine learned to situate Christian life within God's redemptive story rather than viewing it as mere historical artifact or devotional resource.

Michael Fiedrowicz correctly identifies "the Psalms are a microcosm of the Old Testament, so the expositions of the Psalms can be treated as a microcosm of Augustinian thought."[240] Augustine's psalmic interpretation reveals his mature theological method: the integration of christological fulfillment, ecclesiological application, and eschatological orientation within a framework of Christian pilgrimage.

The Psalms as Living Prayer of the Pilgrim Community

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[237] Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 166.
[238] Augustine, *Sermon 319A*
[239] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 4 of Psalm 30.1
[240] Michael Fiederowizc, "Introductory Essay", 64.

For Augustine, the Psalms transcend their historical origins to become the living prayers of the entire community of faith stretching across time. They are not merely ancient Israel's prayers but the ongoing prayer of the Church as pilgrim people journeying toward their eternal destination. This understanding reflects Augustine's broader christological hermeneutic: the Psalms find their fulfillment in Christ and thus become the authentic voice of Christians united to him.[241]

Tuebner astutely observes that "The Psalms thus take pride of place in Augustine's distinctive vision of Christian existence."[242] They function not as historical curiosities but as the prayer book of pilgrims, providing both the vocabulary and the vision necessary for the journey from time to eternity.[243] In the Psalms, Augustine discovered what Andrew Louth evocatively describes, with a nod to George Herbert, as "the heart of Augustine: a 'heart in pilgrimage.'"[244]

This understanding of the Psalms as pilgrim prayers allows Augustine to maintain the tension between the "already" and "not yet" of Christian existence. The Psalms give voice to the pilgrim's current experience of longing, struggle, and hope while simultaneously pointing toward the eschatological fulfillment that awaits. They become the perfect prayer form for those who live between Christ's first and second advents—pilgrims who possess the promise but have not yet reached the destination.

Totus Christus

Augustine began preaching the Psalms almost immediately after his ordination to the priesthood, seeking to nourish his congregation with the same spiritual food that sustained him. His goal in

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241 As McCarthy put it, "A primary strategy of Augustine's exegesis is to show how the Psalms apply to his congregation." McCarthy, however, unhelpfully downgrades the importance of the rest of Scripture in seeking to elevate the psalms. He continues, "Unlike passages of other biblical books, the words of the Psalms are formally assimilable to the lives of those who hear them." Michael McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning: Augustine, the Psalms, and the Making of the Church," *Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2005): 25.
242 Teubner, "For Augustine, human desires pray without ceasing, but these desires are shaped by patiently making the words of the Psalms one's own," Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 78.
243 Fiedorowicz, again, "Considered as the voice of the whole Christ the Psalms are not primarily a collection of literary texts that grew through an historical period, but the living prayer of a community, interpreted and enriched by the faith experiences of countless generations. For Augustine the church is therefore the all embracing subject in whose memory the deepest meaning of the psalms, the wisdom of Christ, is preserved and brought to mind." Fiedorowicz, "Introductory Essay," 64.
244Andrew Louth, "Heart in Pilgrimage: St Augustine's Reading of the Psalms," in *Selected Essays, Volume I: Studies in Patristics*, ed. Lewis Ayres and John Behr (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2023), 147.

expounding the psalms, as in all his preaching, was to form the faith of the assembled and move them along on the pilgrim journey. Yet in preaching the psalms, Augustine was teaching both doctrinal content and the very practice of faith itself. His sermons on the psalms were one means of moving his listeners, but in those sermons Augustine is forming his listeners to appreciate the psalms themselves as means of being moved. This dual movement - by his sermons and by the psalms - mirrors Augustine's reciprocal understanding of prayer itself. As his sermons are designed to move the souls of his listeners, so were the psalms, and thus his sermons on the psalms comprised this dual movement of the pilgrim soul. As Teubner astutely observes, "prayer seems to resist a reduction to either praxis or belief considered alone."[245] In his psalm expositions, Augustine instructed his hearers both in how to understand these ancient prayers and, more crucially, how to pray them.[246] Within this pastoral context, he began developing his mature understanding of the Christian's relationship to the diverse voices encountered throughout the psalter.

Michael Cameron has compellingly documented the progression of Augustine's exploration of the early psalms while concurrently engaging Paul's epistles. This dual reading proved transformative: "Once Augustine read the Psalms in terms of Paul's insights about Christ's crucified human humility, they yielded an unexpectedly rich trove of insights that permanently altered Augustine's Christian faith and reading of Scripture."[247]

The alteration Cameron identifies centers on Augustine's evolving understanding of the relationship between Christ and his church—head to body—a development that would require years to reach full theological maturity.[248] Throughout this lengthy process of discovery, however, one element remained constant: Augustine's conviction that the psalms are best understood as the prayers of a pilgrim people journeying toward their ultimate destination. Even as his *totus Christus* framework reached theological sophistication, Augustine never abandoned the pilgrimage paradigm. Rather, like prayer itself, his exposition of prayer within both the *totus Christus* and pilgrimage frameworks seemed to expand and deepen with exploration, revealing their fundamental

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[245] Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 8 continues, "…the rapprochement between prayer and doctrine is necessary for a sophisticated reflection on prayer that puts it into its proper theological context." I suspect Augustine would have approved of and shared this sentiment.

[246] While Teubner, quoting Monique Vincent, will note, "The initial goal of his sermons, according to Vincent, is to teach the faithful to pray the Psalms," I think it more appropriate to note this goal never ceases or is eclipsed. It is not merely the initial goal, as if it is replaced later on. Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 45.

[247] Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 167.

[248] Cameron compellingly and thoroughly charts the progression of Augustine's exploration and Augustine's arrival at the conclusion quoted above. Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 165–212.

interconnection. As Teubner notes, "Through his engagement with Scripture, Augustine's theory of prayer becomes inextricably bound up with his doctrine of Christ."[249]

Augustine's initial challenge lay in discerning which voice spoke in any given psalm—or even within different movements of a single psalm. Through his Pauline reading, however, and his growing appreciation for both Christ's humanity and humility, as well as the essential unity between head and body, Augustine began reconceptualizing the psalms as expressions of one unified voice—Christ and church speaking together. Once Augustine arrived at his mature *totus Christus* framework and developed a fuller Christological reading of both the psalter specifically and the Old Testament generally, he arrives at what Cameron calls Augustine's "fuller view of Christ's humanity" which "suggests the fuller framework for scriptural unity."[250]

Rowan Williams similarly recognizes that while the *totus Christus* framework may have emerged from sermonic and pastoral concerns, its implications extended far beyond homiletical technique to reshape Augustine's entire approach to Scripture and Christian existence. As Williams observes, "The Head-and-Body theology thus provides not only a pastoral understanding of what any believer suffers, but an interpretation of it as creatively building up the outworking of Christ's saving act in contingent history."[251]

Cameron persuasively traces Augustine's theological trajectory in his early psalm expositions toward fuller Christological understanding and more comprehensive scriptural interpretation, including extensive analysis of Augustine's developing grasp of the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures in salvation. Significantly, Cameron cites Question 61 from the *Eighty-Three Miscellaneous Questions*, composed "about the same time as the first Psalms expositions,"[252] where Augustine explicitly employs pilgrimage as a governing metaphor for Christian existence: "And so, he himself leading us, we are liberated from the burdens and travails of this pilgrimage of ours, as though (*tamquam*) escaping from Egypt."[253]

This early utilization of pilgrimage imagery reveals Augustine's appreciation and approbation of Paul's letters, specifically with the Corinthian correspondence. Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:6—"as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord"—becomes a recurring

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[249] Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 66.
[250] Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 190.
[251] Rowan Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," *Interpretation* 58, no. 1 (2004): 20.
[252] Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 176.
[253] Augustine, *Eighty-Three Miscellaneous Questions*, q. 61, quoted in Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 178.

motif in Augustine's sermons, often supplemented with explicit pilgrimage language.[254] Even his earliest psalm expositions hint at this developing framework. In his Exposition of Psalm 7, Augustine speaks of having "crossed over to Christ," while in his commentary on Psalm 17:12, he refers to a future time when Christians will "have passed from faith to sight."[255] Though initially describing interior illumination through wisdom, Augustine develops an eschatological horizon, noting "therefore already in that light which we shall enjoy in the future."[256] Later in the same psalm, he emphasizes the "sustained perseverance" required in this temporal existence as it stretches toward eternal life, moving from "things which are seen are temporal, but things unseen are eternal," where "our hope stretches upward."[257] By Psalm 21, Augustine explicitly employs the language of longing and desire characteristic of pilgrimage movement from present to eternal life, describing "longing for temporal life, but in the words of one converted to you and tending to eternal life."[258]

Cameron's analysis of Pauline influence on Augustine's psalm interpretation is thorough, yet the early prominence of pilgrimage motifs deserves greater attention. While Cameron notes that in Augustine's sermon on Psalm 3:9, he presents "the prayer of Christ's pilgrim body grieving amid persecutions,"[259] the full scope of this early pilgrimage theology remains underexplored in existing scholarship.

Thus, it seems, Augustine is formulating his understanding of the *totus Christus* alongside of, or perhaps even nested within, his understanding of the Christian life as one of pilgrimage and the psalms as the prayers of pilgrims. These two unique contributions, the *totus Christus* and the prayers of pilgrims, were not just concurrent in Augustine's thought, they were also codependent. His "greater awareness of a Pauline understanding of 'salvation history' in which the whole Church is caught up"[260] shaped not only his psalm interpretation but his entire approach to Scripture and

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[254] See Expositions 2 of Psalm 26.10; 41.10; 48.5; 64.1; 83.5; 85.11; 114.8; Exposition 10 of Psalm 118.2; 123.2; 148.4; Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.3

[255] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 17.12

[256] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 17.12

[257] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 17.25

[258] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 21.3

[259] Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 187.

[260] Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 5, continues, "It is tempting to separate neatly between 'temporal 'and 'eternal 'with respect to 'this age 'and the 'age to come. 'But this would fail to consider - or, at least, render incoherent - Augustine's definition of 'eternal 'in the ascent at Ostia: 'for to have been and to be in the future do not apply to her because eternity is simply to be for to have been and to be in the future are not eternal'. While it might be natural to think of the term 'eternal' as an everlasting extension of temporality, in light of Augustine's understanding of 'eternal 'as 'no past or future 'it seems incomplete to suggest that everlasting exhausts the sense of the term eternal." I suspect that Teubner here conflates Augustine on

Christian existence. As Tueber noted, "In this doctrine, prayer becomes the intersection of Christology and soteriology, doctrine and practice. In short, totus Christus is the gathering point of the Christian's pursuit to pray and live as the body of Christ." Ultimately, *totus Christus* serves as the theological focal point for the Christian community's pursuit of prayer and life as Christ's body in pilgrimage toward its eternal home.[261]

Sing as You Go

One does not merely pray the psalms, however, as any other speech. In the liturgical context of worship in Hippo, Carthage, and other locations Augustine may have served as guest preacher, his sermons unfolded within the larger framework of gathered worship. The service included various scriptural readings and the chanting of one or more psalms. Augustine frequently acknowledged this liturgical setting, referencing the chanted psalm whether or not it was the text of his homily.[262] As he reflected on the psalms' importance for both his personal piety and his congregations' spiritual formation, Augustine consistently preached on the psalms, encouraged their use, and identified them specifically as sung prayers. Yet these are not merely any songs or prayers—they are pilgrim songs, sung as pilgrim prayers along the journey. Drawing particularly on the psalms of ascent (Psalms 120-134) as well as the psalter more broadly, Augustine illuminates the distinctive character of singing the psalms as the sung prayers of pilgrims.

In a memorable sermon on Psalm 66 [67], likely delivered in Carthage during late 411 or early 412, Augustine situates the present psalm within its broader liturgical context. He notes that the congregation has already sung, prayed, and heard expositions of two other psalms before turning to this one. The theme of blessing and praising God has emerged in each previous exhortation and will appear again. Augustine returns to the reciprocal nature of prayer, now in the context of

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eternity with Augustine on immortality. His sharp distinction is only warranted in respect to the difference between the divine and the human. For God, certainly, eternal is not an extension of temporality, though for the human, this seems appropriate to Augustine's thought. It is precisely the tension between 'this age' and 'the age to come' that Augustine's pilgrimage motif straddles and settles.

261 Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 69.

262 On the liturgical setting of the psalms for Augustine, see Micheal Fiederowisc's introductory essay. "Augustine's interpretation of the psalms was carried on above all within liturgical proclamation. In his time the liturgy of the word, which was part of the eucharistic celebration, usually included a psalm read or sung by a lector between the Old Testament reading and the New. To this psalm the congregation responded with a refrain." Fiedrowicz, "General Introduction," in *Exposition of Psalm 1–32*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 15 (New City Press, 2000), 16.

blessing: "May our soul bless the Lord, and may God bless us. When God blesses us, we grow, and when we bless the Lord, we grow; so in either case the gain is ours."[263] The reciprocal character of prayer remains central to Augustine's homiletical message. With harvest imagery suggesting an autumn date for this sermon, as Boulding observes, Augustine presents blessing as fruitfulness: "The Lord's blessing of us has the priority, and our blessing of the Lord is its consequence. His blessing is the rain, and our response in blessing him is the fruit."[264]

Our responsive blessing, Augustine preaches, takes the form of prayer—specifically, prayer in song. "Our blessing is offered like a harvest to God, for he is the farmer who sends rain on us and cultivates us. We must sing to him, therefore, not with sterile devotion, nor with fallow protests, but with truth in our hearts…"[265] The praise of God, arising from the truth of his already-given grace, emerges from the heart's depths and finds expression through voices raised in song. In this manner, liturgical singing becomes, for Augustine, a form of prayer—the songs of pilgrims.

Augustine's exposition continues by distinguishing between God's temporal and eternal blessings. The crucial point remains, whether temporal or eternal blessings are considered, God remains "the source of all that is good—he, the creator and re-creator of all that exists."[266] Even the finest temporal blessings can be removed, as his congregation surely understands from experience. He appeals to their lived reality of blessing—they have received temporal blessings and seen them taken away. Moreover, they observe that temporal blessings appear distributed randomly among good and evil people alike.[267]

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[263] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 66.1

[264] Note once again, contra Dupont and Knotts in "Why Pray? Augustine on the Rhetoric of Prayer," *Rhetorica 31, no. 1 (2013): 47-65,* Augustine is not prioritizing the human initiative and energy toward God in prayer. Quite the opposite in fact, the emphasis in the opening of this sermon is the initiative and energy of God. It is the blessing of God, grace one might say, that prompts prayer in the first place, and all human prayer is a response to grace already given. Augustine consistently situates human action as response, especially so in prayer.

[265] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 66.1

[266] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 66.1

[267] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 66.3. Augustine takes the opportunity, perhaps again noting the autumnal harvest, of mentioning the work of the ant. Those who study, pray, worship, and seek to make progress in the Christian faith while life is good and when temporal blessings abound are like the ant who stores in summer in preparation for winter. "Sooner or later, winter arrives. Is there anyone who never goes through a winter? Some loss befalls them, or some bereavement." The ant provides Augustine with the metaphor he needs to encourage Christian discipline now, such that it will serve the one who employs it later. In the study of scripture, in worship and in prayer, they are to make progress now while the weather is fine, for when winter comes, progress is more difficult to make. "Some accident will befall you, some calamity will catch you on the wrong foot. The world is full of such disasters; we hear about them every day. Now, while you are enjoying summer, I tell you, while there are plenty of grains you can collect, study the ant, you sluggard. Gather them

Ultimate blessing, however, lies beyond the walls of this world. Integrating the psalm's own language, God's supreme blessing is what we pray and long for: "May he make his face shine on us."[268] Augustine interprets this as the dual beatitude of God illuminating his image within each person and the final flooding of creation with uncreated divine light. The pilgrim travels toward this eternal light through this world's temporal darkness. For the pilgrim traveler, there is celestial brightness of the age to come just ahead. The songs of prayer prove necessary for this journey as a partial light to the path and encouragement to walk what has been illumined. In this sermon's most memorable passage, Augustine preaches:

> Walk in the way with all nations, walk in the way with all peoples, O you children of grace, children of the one Catholic Church; walk in the way, and sing as you go. This is what wayfarers do to lighten their fatigue. You do the same. Sing along the road. Through the way himself I beg you, sing in this way, and sing a new song. Let no one still sing the old song there; sing love-songs about your homeland, and let the old songs be heard on no one's lips anymore. A new way, a new wayfarer, and a new song.[269]

Travelers sing to lighten fatigue, sustain stamina, and encourage arrival at journey's end. Similarly, Augustine argues, Christians should sing the psalms generally and this psalm particularly. The psalter's sung prayers, poured out in worship, lighten the singer's burden. Augustine again invokes Paul, quoting 2 Corinthians 5, though now focusing not on pilgrims embodied and absent from the Lord, but on the declaration that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away, and lo, everything is made new!"[270] That which has been made new requires a new song.

Though the song is new, it remains a "love-song about your homeland"—a land the pilgrim has not yet reached.[271] Anticipating the heavenly festival's sounds and making them their own, pilgrims sing new creation's new song while remaining within the old creation. Thus the new song consists of "tones of people on their journey, people not yet in their homeland."[272] It is a song that is at once new and ancient, one they may have never heard, yet seem to know by heart.

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now, in summer, while you have the chance. Winter will not permit you to forage, but then you will be able to eat what you have collected."

[268] Psalm 67:1

[269] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 66.6

[270] 2 Cor 5:17

[271] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.9 See extended discussion of this song and the heavenly festival motif in chapter one on pilgrim ecclesiology.

[272] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.15

The psalms of ascent uniquely capture for Augustine not merely the historical ascent of pilgrims journeying toward Jerusalem, but the Christian pilgrim's journey toward the New Jerusalem. Here, especially in these ascent psalms, Augustine appears to conflate prayer with singing. The psalm's performance, particularly in corporate worship, becomes essential to prayer. Just as the individual worshiper's voice joins the larger gathered faithful in song, so individual prayer is incorporated into the body of Christ, united with its head. Consequently, the love song about the homeland carries notes of lament and longing, being more a song of absence than arrival. "In this psalm a city is sung about and celebrated, a city of which we are citizens by virtue of being Christians, a city from which we are absent abroad as long as we are mortal, and towards which we are traveling."[273] It expresses longing for a home never visited, for a city holding ultimate citizenship from which pilgrims currently remain abroad. This absence, Augustine argues, renders even the new song a song of anguish: "What strikes anguish into the heart of a Christian? The fact of not yet living with Christ. Over what is a Christian heart wrung with pain? Over being a pilgrim still, and longing for our homeland."[274]

This anguish persists in the pilgrim's heart even amid abundant temporal blessings, for the blessing of eternity and the blessing of the face of Christ remain on the distant shore. The pilgrim faces many miles and "a wide river to cross."[275] The new song remains a prayer of groaning for all in this pilgrim state, so the psalms of ascent become the pilgrim's sung prayers, giving voice to their longing: "Groaning, you seek it; seeking it, you long for it; and as you long, you ascend, singing this Song of Steps. You sing, 'To you have I lifted up my eyes, you who dwell in heaven.'"[276]

The reciprocal nature of prayer appears uniquely in song as well, for Augustine observes that in singing we voice and thereby kindle our hearts' longing for ultimate satisfaction. The pilgrim song, as sung, generates more music, melody, and murmured prayer. Such sung prayers encourage the praying singer to maintain the path for which these songs were composed. With the *totus Christus* again in view, sung prayer occurs in Christ, while walking Christ's way, on the path that is Christ: "As we walk along in Christ, pilgrims still until we arrive, sighing with desire for the unutterable peace that abides in that city—a peace concerning which we are promised what eye has not seen,

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[273] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.1
[274] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 122.2
[275] Buddy and Julie Miller, "Wide River to Cross" (2004).
[276] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 122.2

nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived (1 Cor 2:9)—as we walk, I say, let us so sing as to enkindle our longing."[277]

It is in Christ that the psalms of ascent become pilgrims' songs. The historical pilgrim's longing to see Jerusalem signifies the longing of every human heart to see God. "All who long for it are singing in their hearts, even if their tongues are silent, whereas anyone who has no longing is dumb in God's presence, however great a din such a person makes in human ears."[278] The fervent love demonstrated by those who first sang these songs, Augustine preaches, was kindled by the Spirit's gift. "Fired by the same Spirit," our longing for the heavenly city receives voice through the same Spirit using the same prayer. As Williams observes, "What is distinctive about any hermeneutic of the Psalms is that singing them is quite simply and literally an appropriation of Christ's life, in history and eternity."[279]

When we sing the psalms, our voices join not only the heavenly chorus of the celestial city but stretch backward to incorporate previously sung songs. Prayer becomes the full choir of earth and heaven, sung uniquely as psalms written by Christ and directed by the Spirit. Williams notes the distinctive component of the psalter's sung prayers: "singing of the psalms becomes the most immediate routine means of identifying with the voice of Christ. And that identification carries implications for the kind of mutual relation that concretely defines the life of the church."[280]

The longing and desire at the heart of these pilgrim songs also voice their future fulfillment. The new song will one day no longer express longing and lament, but laudation and praise. Mirroring the transformation that awaits pilgrims themselves, pilgrim songs express and exhibit movement from one reality to the next as they move from prayer to praise.

From Prayer to Praise

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[277] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.1

[278] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.1

[279] Williams, *Augustine and the Psalms*, 21.

[280] Williams, *Augustine and the Psalms*, 22. Williams is careful to point out that Augustine's use of the psalms does not denigrate their historical situatedness or use. Though they point beyond themselves and find their voice more fully in the whole Christ, it is not as if their history is unimportant. Quite the opposite, it is only as they were sung by historic pilgrims on their way to the historic Jerusalem can they be signs of all future pilgrims on the way to the heavenly city. "For Augustine, the "spiritual" reading of at least these portions of scripture does not evade or relativize the "historical" sense, which roots us in our own present history, not simply in a scriptural past." Williams, *Augustine and the Psalms*, 23.

The pilgrim's songs will undergo a fundamental transformation from temporal to eternal, moving from prayer to praise. What pilgrims sing now constitutes a song of hope, but in classic Augustinian formulation, this will evolve from a song of hope into a song of praise. "Then it will be alleluia in reality, the real thing; while now it is just in hope. Hope sings it, love sings it now, love will also sing it then; but now love sings it with hunger, then it will sing it with satisfied enjoyment."[281] In his sermons marking the beginning of Easter, Augustine characteristically refers to the Great Fifty Days of Eastertide as "alleluia time." As we noted earlier, the Mary and Martha typology enables Augustine to consider the church in its present pilgrimage condition while anticipating its future glory. Similarly, the pilgrim songs of groaning sung now will yield to songs of glory then.

While Van Bavel correctly recognizes the "twofold return" to God through "praise and love," he understates the consummation he describes. He writes, "Praise is the consummation of one's return to God as the source of one's virtues. Love is the culmination of desire, found in continually renewed awareness that life's goods are contingent gifts, and signals of something more than themselves."[282] Yet for Augustine God transcends being merely "the source of one's virtues"—he is the source of all existence and the fountain of eternal life. When pilgrims arrive at their destination and God's face shines upon them forever, their new song currently sung in hope will be sung in reality—the ultimate reality of the new creation.

The rest promised pilgrims upon finally reaching home will be the rest of praise. Unfettered from the perils of the road, pilgrims will be liberated to praise: "We shall be free from anxiety, and carefree we shall sing, and carefree we shall play the lyre when we contemplate the delight of the Lord and are protected as his temple, in that incorruptibility where death is swallowed up in victory."[283] The prayerful singing of psalms cultivates in congregations deeper desire to reach that distant shore and continue walking Christ's path until arrival.[284]

The pilgrim, like the Church itself, participates in Martha's journey toward Mary, singing Martha's songs now while already learning Mary's tune. The pilgrim songs of ascent will yield to psalms of praise upon arrival. As Williams eloquently observes, when the pilgrim community sings these pilgrim songs, "the church as a whole is revealed as the community where humanity is allowed

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[281] Augustine, *Sermon* 255.5
[282] Tarsicius J. van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine's Doctrine on Prayer*, Peeters: Leuven, 2009, 154.
[283] Augustine, *Exposition 2 of the Psalm* 26.14
[284] Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, "Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 2 (2005): 171.

full scope to say what it is, in terms of its failure and pain, so that it may fully become what it is created to be, the multiple echo of the Word's response to the Father."[285] Though the pilgrim community sings these songs corporately, they remain on each individual pilgrim's lips. The pilgrim community sings these songs precisely as prayers during their journey, for the journey itself provides the context for its songs. The journey moves from groaning to glory, and the pilgrim's prayer songs likewise progress from petition to praise, for "prayer will pass away, praise will take over; weeping will pass away, joy will take its place."[286]

As pilgrims travel, the psalms as pilgrim songs provide joy for the journey, courage for the course, and perseverance for the path. "In the meantime, when we are in the days of our troubles, let our prayer to God not cease, and let us go on asking him for that one thing. Let us not interrupt that petition until it is answered, by God's gift and through God's goodness. Hearken, Lord, to my voice, with which I have cried to you; have mercy on me, and hearken to me."[287]

As Our Savior Taught Us, So We Pray

In his series of sermons to baptismal candidates, Augustine would systematically expound the Creed line by line as the faith required for baptism. He would also work through the Lord's Prayer with these same seekers—sermons focused on faith's practice rather than its content.[288] As he explained in Sermon 57: "The right order for your formation and for building you up in the Christian community is for you first to learn what you should believe, and afterward what you should pray for."[289] Augustine thus delivered sermons on the Lord's Prayer as the quintessential response to the question of how Christians ought to pray. If Augustine perceives in the psalms the songs, prayers, and sighs of pilgrims on their journey, even the prayer Jesus taught his disciples finds its place within this same framework. It constitutes, as Lamb observes, the "paradigmatic practice of hope."[290] Like the psalms, the voice of Jesus' prayer is given directly to disciples and apostles, and thus to the entire

[285] Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," 21.
[286]Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm*, 122.2
[287] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm*2 of Ps 26.14.
[288] Augustine's *Sermons* 56-59 deal explicitly with the Lord's Prayer while *Sermons* 212-214 are given at the handing over of the creed to the catechumens, sermon 215 at the giving back of the creed, and *Sermon* 398 on the creed to the catechumens again.
[289] Augustine, *Sermon 57.1*
[290] Lamb, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 48.

church, so that this prayer of Jesus as head becomes equally the prayer of the body.[291] The Lord's Prayer is "the Church's prayer; it's the voice coming from the Lord's own magisterial chair."[292] The Lord's Prayer, no less than the psalms, receives voice as the *totus Christus*, and equally serves as the prayer of pilgrims.

Augustine categorizes the prayer's petitions into two groups: one category addresses eternal life, while the other concerns present temporal existence.[293] More specifically, the first three petitions request preparation for the age to come, while the remaining petitions address life in this present age. Augustine situates all these petitions, consistent with his broader theology of prayer, within the locus of desire. Again employing rhetorical questions in his preaching, he asks:

> Here though, I suppose, someone may say, "If he knows what is necessary for us, why should we say even a few words? Why pray at all? He knows; let him give us what he knows we need." Yes, but the reason he wanted you to pray is so that he can give to an eager recipient, not to one who is bored with what he has given. This eager desire, you see, is something he himself has slipped into our bosoms. So then, the words our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us in his prayer give us the framework of true desires.[294]

Jesus has instructed his disciples—and thus his church—both what to pray for and, consequently, what to desire. The Lord's Prayer, like prayer generally, both arises from desire and kindles desire for proper objects. The crucial element, consistent with Augustine's broader understanding of prayer, is recognizing the journey and the destination.

Commenting on the prayer's opening petition, "Our Father, who art in heaven," Augustine preaches: "Remember that you have a Father in heaven. Remember that you were born from your father Adam for death, that you are to be reborn from your Father God for life."[295] The life he references is the rebirth symbolized in baptism and toward which the pilgrim journeys—the life of the age to come. This provides the context and framework for all desire, and consequently, all

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[291] "In the totus Christus, prayer is both a practice of desire and a practice of waiting; it is both an expression of the Church's holiness and an expression of its sinfulness. This is formed through the Christian making the petitions of the Lord's Prayer her own." Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 80.

[292] Augustine, *Sermon 181.6*

[293] Augustine's sermons on the Lord's Prayer receive careful attention and exposition by P. F. Beatrice and M. O'Connell, 'Lord's Prayer, 'in *Augustine through the Ages* (ed. A.D. Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 506–509.

[294] Augustine, *Sermon 56.4*

[295] Augustine *Sermon 56*.5. So also, in *Sermon 57.2*, Augustine locates the pilgrim life as growth for and towards eternal life, using the metaphor of the seekers of baptism as infants, given birth and new life from God and the Church. They are those on their way through life from birth, through death, and into new life. "God our Father and the Church our mother, of whom we may be born to eternal life. Let us reflect, beloved, on whose children we have begun to be, and let us live in a way that befits those who have such a Father."

prayer. "What you are longing for, what you are setting your heart on by this prayer, is that you may live in such a way as to belong to the kingdom of God, which is to be given to all the saints. So you are praying for yourself, that you may live a good life, when you say, Thy kingdom come. May we belong to your kingdom; may it also come to us, the kingdom that is going to come to your holy ones and just ones."[296] This longing encompasses both the kingdom of God and the pilgrim's worthiness for that kingdom.

Indeed, as we have observed in Augustine's broader theology of prayer, the Lord's Prayer specifically demonstrates the same movement along the continuum from time to eternity. However, in the Lord's Prayer, we see explicit commencement with petitions for eternity before proceeding to petitions for temporal life. While human inclination might begin prayer with temporal concerns, Augustine demonstrates that the Lord's Prayer teaches the correct order of desire from the outset, immediately situating any temporal concerns within eternal perspective. Christian life and Christian prayer are embodied along this same continuum. "Sure, it's a very long hour as we wait for that great day; just think how many years this last hour is lasting. Nonetheless, try to treat it like one who wakes, sleeps, rises and reigns. Now we are awake, at death we shall sleep, at the end we shall rise, without end we shall reign."[297] The key to Christian faith and practice, Augustine explains, is to "treat it like one who wakes, sleeps, rises, and reigns"—in other words, like a pilgrim.

Only with the perspective of the age to come can pilgrims pray correctly for necessities in this present age. Only with the perspective of immortality, when death has been swallowed up in victory, can prayers for mortal life be faithfully offered.[298] Once the initial petitions have established the table and tone of the pilgrim's destination, Augustine continues with the prayer's remainder as requirements along the way: "There remain some petitions for this life of our pilgrimage; that's why it goes on, Give us this day our daily bread (Mt 6:11). Give us eternal things, give us the things of time. You have promised us the kingdom; don't deny us support on the way there. You will give us everlasting honors in your home; give us temporal provisions on earth."[299] One requests earthly

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[296] Augustine, *Sermon 56.6*

[297] Augustine, *Sermon 57.5*

[298] So, as in Sermon 56.8, "God's will is being done in heaven, but not yet on earth. But when flesh has given its consent to mind, and death is swallowed up in victory…" It is worth noting yet again, that Augustine is mapping not just the psalms as prayer within and around a Pauline framework, but so too the Lord's Prayer. As Augustine reads Paul, so his sermons become decidedly Pauline.

[299] Augustine, *Sermon 57.5.* Similarly, in the context of praying for daily bread, "But from this place on, until the end of the prayer, it's clear that we are asking God for things for ourselves." 56.9

things from God during the journey to heaven—not as less important, but as necessities the wayfarer requires while "sailing on a dangerous voyage" through earthly life.[300]

Each petition proves necessary, each request viable and vital, such that Augustine refuses to denigrate the earthly in favor of the heavenly. For Augustine, Jesus' prayer teaches that the pilgrim journey passes through life rather than around it. Consequently, it does not denigrate this present age but elevates it as the necessary passage from birth to new birth, from death to life. The pilgrim has present needs and must pray for them to pass safely through this life toward "that life [where] there will be no evil, but good will abide for ever and ever."[301]

The prayer Jesus taught his disciples constituted the quintessential pilgrim prayer. As the pilgrim prayer *par excellence*, it should be memorized, vocalized, and embodied. Knotts and Dupont suggest that "prayer enjoyed a preeminent place not simply in Augustine's personal piety, but in his theological and philosophical doctrine as well,"[302] and therefore his own practice illustrates his theological perspective. Contrary to much contemporary scholarship that tends to ignore Augustine's primary vocation as a bishop caring for souls—one who prays and teaches others to pray—Lamb correctly observes: "The Lord's Prayer is not simply an analytical scaffolding device on which Augustine hangs his theological doctrines, as most interpreters assume, but a moral, spiritual, and social practice whose repetition can enable practitioners to reorder their hopes."[303] This prayer in particular, as Knotts and Dupont memorably put it, "included a fundamentally normative, or better yet, formative aspect."[304]

Augustine's sermons to baptismal candidates regularly include references to the Lord's Prayer and thus demonstrate that his pilgrim prayer motif is foundational to his conception of Christian faith's practice. As soon as one seeks baptism, one must confront the pilgrim journey, making baptism a crucial marker along the way, while prayer becomes the process of sustaining the newly baptized on their undertaken pilgrimage. Daily life and eternal life are linked for the pilgrim, as seen in Jesus' prayer. "So these four are necessary because of our daily life, the other three because of eternal life. But let us ask for them all, so that we may reach that life; and here let us beg,

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300 Augustine, *Sermon 56.19*
301 Augustine, *Sermon 56.19*
302 Knotts and Dupont, "Why Pray," 50.
303 Lamb, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 60.
304 Knotts and Dupont, "Why Pray," 61.

in order not to be cut off from it. This prayer is to be said by you every day, when you have been baptized."[305]

Having examined the broader contours of Augustine's understanding and preached theology of prayer in his sermons, we can observe the full integration of how Augustine weaves these themes together through the pilgrimage motif by examining two pivotal sermons. In these sermons, Augustine integrates the various threads of his theology of prayer into a tapestry of pilgrim discourse. While Augustine's sermon on Psalm 85 enjoys recognition and appreciation for its perspective on prayer, his sermon on Psalm 37 receives less scholarly attention. Analyzing both sermons will demonstrate Augustine's distinctive conception of prayer as the pilgrim's native tongue along the way, as each sermon uniquely weaves together various prayer themes found throughout the broader corpus of Augustinian homiletics.

Sermon on Psalm 37 (38): Prayer as Pilgrim Song

Augustine begins his sermon on Psalm 37 (38) by situating the psalm within the liturgical context of the day, demonstrating his characteristic practice of weaving scriptural texts together in both sermon and liturgy. He connects the psalm to the previously read gospel text from Matthew 15, suggesting that this psalm "could be on the lips of the woman we heard about." This immediate intertextual connection reinforces Augustine's fundamental conviction that the psalms constitute the prayers of the Church—no less relevant for his fourth-century congregation than for those who first sang them in their original context.[306]

The psalm's superscription, "A psalm for David himself, for a remembrance of the Sabbath," affords Augustine with another opportunity to ground the text in his congregation's spiritual experience. Through direct interrogation of both psalm and audience, he poses a rhetorical question that becomes theologically generative: how can someone remember a Sabbath? His insight proves foundational: "No one remembers a thing unless it is absent."[307] This observation leads

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[305] Augustine, *Sermon 58.12*

[306] For other examples of Augustine introducing his sermon text within the larger liturgical context, as well as examples of tying it to various previous readings in the worship for the day, see, *Exposition of Psalm* 2 of Psalm 25.5; *Exposition of Psalm* 29.1; 37.1; 40.1; 55.17; 57.1; 84.9; 90.1; 102,1.

[307] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.2

Augustine to locate the remembrance of the Sabbath precisely within the psalm's groaning—the memory of rest becomes not merely the context of the psalmist's lament but its very source.

"We meet here someone who is suffering, groaning, mourning, and remembering the Sabbath. The Sabbath is rest. The speaker was unquestionably in some kind of restless trouble, when with sighs he was remembering that rest."[308] For Augustine, this memory carries a bittersweet quality that defines the pilgrim condition. To remember fondly is still to experience absence, to be without the thing remembered. The memory of Sabbath becomes a memory of eschatological rest—though Augustine has not yet employed the pilgrim motif explicitly, this psalm emerges as a wayfarer's prayer, expressing the restlessness of one not yet at home.

Pauline Foundations and Cosmic Groaning

Augustine's exposition reveals the continued influence of Pauline theology on his developing understanding of the psalms. Drawing extensively from Romans 8, he situates the psalmist's suffering within Paul's cosmic vision of the groaning of creation. The absence of Sabbath—the lack of rest and the presence of suffering—participates in a larger, cosmic struggle. Augustine observes pointedly: "If Paul was waiting for the salvation of his body, the salvation he already had was not full salvation."

This insight allows Augustine to articulate the tension inherent in post-Easter Christian existence. The faithful pilgrim inhabits what might be called a liminal temporality—living with one foot in "alleluia" time while the other remains planted in the age of lament. The Christian exists simultaneously in the already and not yet of salvation history. The groaning of Psalm 37 exhibits the lament of one not yet at home, not yet at rest, who can experience the Sabbath only as a memory of anticipation rather than present reality.

Returning to his metaphor of Christ as physician, Augustine notes: "Compared with the health I shall have then, the health I have now is no better than disease."[309] This medical imagery reinforces the pilgrim's provisional status—even present wellness appears as sickness when measured against eschatological wholeness.

The Voice of the Totus Christus

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[308] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.1
[309] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.5

While Augustine typically addresses questions of psalmic voice early in his expositions, here he delays this crucial discussion until well into the sermon, having established the context of memory, suffering, and cosmic groaning. Only when reaching verse 3 does he pose his characteristic question: "Who is speaking here?"[310] This delay proves strategic, as it allows the theological weight of the *totus Christus* doctrine to address the existential questions already raised. Augustine's response demonstrates the maturity of his thinking on this central doctrine:

> The need to make sense of this forces us to recognize that "Christ" here is the full Christ, the whole Christ; that is, Christ, Head and body. When Christ speaks, he sometimes does so in the person of the Head alone, the Savior who was born of the virgin Mary; but at other times he speaks in the person of his body, holy Church diffused throughout the world. We are within his body, provided that we have sincere faith in him, and unshakable hope, and burning charity. We are within his body, we are members of it, and we find ourselves speaking those words.[311]

This exposition reveals Augustine's mature integration of Christology, ecclesiology, and the practice of prayer. By referencing Paul's "one body" theology from Ephesians 5:30 and connecting it to his earlier discovery of Christ's voice in Psalm 22, Augustine reminds his congregation of a fundamental truth about psalmic prayer: in praying the psalms, they pray in Christ, through Christ, and with Christ.

As Teubner observes, following Cameron's analysis, Augustine's theological development parallels the pilgrim journey itself—he arrives at this understanding after wrestling and wandering in the wilderness of interpretation. Significantly, this progression involves not merely the incorporation of biblical language into his thought but the displacement of philosophical categories by biblical ones. Scripture becomes "the ontologically basic reality and vocabulary for Augustine," such that "the ascent of the soul is thus now unambiguously an historical process that takes place through the course of one's life."[312]

This Pauline framework allows Augustine to situate his congregation within salvation history itself. When he traces connections between Psalm 22, Ephesians 5, Genesis 2, Matthew 19, and Acts 9, he demonstrates how "the whole Church is caught up" in Paul's understanding of salvation history.[313] The voice of the psalmist becomes the voice of Christ, which becomes the voice of the

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[310] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.6
[311] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.6
[312] Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine,* 57.
[313] Teubner, *Prayer After Augustine*, 58.

Church—making this psalm, this voice, this song authentically theirs. As Augustine concludes: "Whenever you hear the voice of the body, do not separate it from the voice of the Head; and whenever you hear the voice of the Head, do not separate him from the body; for they are two no longer, but one flesh."[314]

Memory, Scent, and the Senses of Pilgrimage

Augustine's treatment of verse 6 introduces a striking sensory dimension to pilgrimage spirituality through his exploration of memory and scent. Drawing again from Pauline theology—this time Ephesians on being incorporated into Christ's aroma—Augustine contrasts the stench of sin with the memory of a different fragrance: that of being the fragrance of Christ. Like the sounds of heaven's eternal festival, this fragrance belongs to Christ and becomes ours through incorporation into his body.[315] The pilgrim catches intimations of Christ's fragrance in the present, yet this scent beckons onward toward the land from which it emanates:

> But where does the fragrance come from? From hope. What is its source, if not the memory of the Sabbath? We bewail the bad smell in this life, but already we catch the scent of the life to come. We bewail our stinking sins, but breathe the fragrance of what awaits us. If that sweet scent were not soliciting us, we should never remember the Sabbath. But through the Spirit we can detect it...[316]

This passage reveals Augustine's sophisticated understanding of a spiritual sensory awareness within the pilgrimage motif. Like pilgrim songs that encourage and beckon, the scent of Christ encountered in prayer serves as encouragement to continue walking toward the source of that heavenly fragrance. The pilgrim learns to detect the new creation's fragrance even while traversing through the old creation's decay, developing what might be called an eschatological olfaction.

The Formation of Eschatological Vision

Building on the sensory theme, Augustine addresses the need for properly formed sight in the pilgrim journey. As he had counseled Proba about the necessity of praying to perceive rightly, here he emphasizes prayer's role in forming eschatological vision. From scent to sight, the senses require

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[314] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.6
[315] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 41.5
[316] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.6

formation to perceive reality as it is and as it will be—sight, like scent, must become properly eschatological.

Augustine identifies the problem: the pilgrim remains "locked fast in those illusions" and "deceitful fantasies" of temporal life. Prayer becomes both petition for and means of receiving proper vision. Christ promises "a vision of the truth"—that is, himself.[317] The psalmist's voice, and thus the voice of those praying with him, requests the dawning light of salvation to illuminate the eyes of faith, enabling them to "see their present situation" and "recognize where we are." This prayer for truth and sight enables right perception of the pilgrim journey itself—understanding "where we are" facilitates remembering where we are headed. Augustine concludes: "Let us remember the Sabbath and patiently wait for what he has promised, he who has given us in himself an example of patience."[318]

Prayer as Continuous Desire

Augustine's exposition of Psalm 37 provides one of his clearest articulations of prayer as desire—or more precisely, prayer as the desire of the heart made vocal. As the pilgrim receives the vision of truth in Christ through prayer, that sight illuminates the pilgrim journey as precisely that—a journey—and further inflames the original desire that motivates pilgrimage.

Incorporating Pauline theology once more, Augustine identifies the restless, ceaseless desire of the human heart for God—the image bearer's longing to return to the image bestower—as the source of prayer that never ceases. Where desire remains, prayer remains:

> This very desire is your prayer, and if your desire is continuous, your prayer is continuous too. The apostle meant what he said, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17). But can we be on our knees all the time, or prostrate ourselves continuously, or be holding up our hands uninterruptedly, that he bids us, "Pray without ceasing"? If we say that these things constitute prayer, I do not think we can pray without ceasing. But there is another kind of prayer that never ceases, an interior prayer that is desire.[319]

Augustine weaves his reciprocal understanding of prayer throughout these themes—desire, song, memory, and time—each demonstrating that prayer receives even as it gives. Prayer arises from

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317 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.10
318 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.12
319 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.14

interior desire (for home, rest, Sabbath, God) and simultaneously increases that very desire. "If you do not want to interrupt your prayer, let your desire be uninterrupted."[320]

This understanding reveals how prayer as pilgrim practice generates not only desire but love as the steps taken on the journey. The reciprocity of prayer manifests in the pilgrim journey as both more prayer and more love: "If your charity abides all the time, you are crying out all the time; if you are crying out all the time, you are desiring all the time; and if you are desiring, you are remembering rest."[321]

Confession: Sin and Faith in Pilgrim Speech

Augustine's treatment of verse 10 engages the dual nature of confession as both acknowledgment of sin and declaration of faith.[322] In prayer, the pilgrim simultaneously confesses sin and confesses faith—each confession declaring the contingency coterminous with pilgrimage itself. Augustine returns to earlier themes of sight, light, and vision, weaving various motifs together.

The pilgrim receives sight in Christ, but only partially—seeing "through a glass, darkly." Prayer as confession of both sin and faith illustrates the pilgrim status of the Christian: sin yet salvation, guilt yet grace. The "primordial contraction"[323] of the human heart in sin begins, through confession, to expand toward its maker—the dawning light of salvation reaching those who yet walk in darkness.

For the pilgrim, "they have the light only as they remember the Sabbath, as those who discern it, but only in hope." Augustine distinguishes between "the light of faith and the light of hope"—the pilgrim enjoys the light of Christ now in hope and faith, but will one day enjoy that light in the celestial city.[324] The light is discerned now, but dimly, like dawn before daybreak—perceptible

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320 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.14
321 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.14
322 Returning to his theme of prayer as song, while also including the double confession of sin and faith, Augustine's sermon on Psalm 66.6 is representative of much wider emphasis: "They have discovered your way, so let them confess. When you break into song, brothers and sisters, your singing is itself a confession: a confession of your sins and of God's power." Examples of prayer as a confession of sin abound, see for example, Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 34.2; 37.15; 44.33 136.4; 140.19. For prayer as a confession of faith, see Ps. 41.11; 41.33;137.2. So too, Psalm 74.4 is explicit on the dual nature of confession: "People confess a great variety of sins, but all confess the same faith."
323 van Bavel, *Longing of the Heart*, 166.
324 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.15

but not pervasive. The pilgrim therefore prays for light to dawn ever more fully until it envelops all things, moving from hope and faith to reality and resolution.

Augustine demonstrates his commitment to the *totus Christus* approach by applying to confession the same trinitarian formula he uses elsewhere for prayer. While in Psalm 85 he describes prayer as "to him, through him and in [Christ],"[325] here he applies identical language to the one confessing: "There within, with himself, in himself and to himself he confesses it; he confesses it of no one and to no one save himself."[326] Only after establishing this pattern does he apply the formula to Christ: "Let us make this prayer in him, let us make it through him, for he intercedes for us."[327]

Prayer as Pilgrim Speech

Augustine concludes his sermon on Psalm 37 with a masterful synthesis that weaves together the sermon's major themes in anticipation of eschatological fulfillment:

> Contemplating God's glory and seeing him face to face we shall be enabled to praise him forever, without wearying, without any of the pain of iniquity, without any of the perversion of sin. We shall praise God, no longer sighing for him but united with him for whom we have sighed even to the end, albeit joyful in our hope. For we shall be in that city where God is our good, God is our light, God is our bread, God is our life. Whatever is good for us, whatever we miss as we trudge along our pilgrim way, we shall find in him. In him will be that quiet that we remember now, though the memory cannot but cause us pain; for we remember that Sabbath, and about its memory so much has been said, and we must still say so many things, and never cease to speak of it, though with our heart, not our lips; because our lips fall silent only that we may cry the more from our heart.[328]

This conclusion demonstrates how Augustine situates prayer within the pilgrim's eschatological trajectory. The present groaning and sighing of psalm-prayer will give way to eternal praise, yet even now that future praise motivates and shapes present prayer. The "quiet" that pilgrims remember with pain will become their eternal dwelling, where all that they "miss as we trudge along our pilgrim way" will be found in God himself.

Augustine's exposition of Psalm 37 thus provides a comprehensive vision of prayer as pilgrim speech. The psalms emerge as uniquely pilgrim songs, yet all prayer constitutes the native

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[325] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.1
[326] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.15
[327] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.16
[328] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.28

tongue of the pilgrim—the language of that city they seek but do not yet inhabit. Whether teaching catechumens the Lord's Prayer, counseling Proba about petition, or preaching on the psalms, Augustine consistently locates prayer within the pilgrim's temporal journey toward eternal rest.

Exposition of Psalm 85: Hearts Standing Before God

Augustine's exposition of Psalm 85 represents one of his most comprehensive and systematic treatments of prayer. Within this singular homiletical work, Augustine synthesizes multiple theological themes that permeate his broader corpus, weaving them into a coherent framework for understanding Christian prayer. This analysis examines four central theological motifs that emerge from Augustine's exposition: the *totus Christus*, the reciprocal dynamic of prayer, prayer as an exercise in patience, and prayer as the distinctive voice of pilgrims. These themes converge within Augustine's overarching pastoral concern of guiding souls along the spiritual path toward their ultimate destination in God.

The Totus Christus: Christological Foundation of Prayer

Augustine establishes the hermeneutical foundation for his exposition by situating Psalm 85 within his comprehensive understanding of the psalter through the lens of the *totus Christus*. This interpretive framework, which Augustine consistently employs throughout his psalm commentaries, becomes particularly significant when applied to a psalm explicitly focused on prayer. The *totus Christus* provides Augustine with the theological architecture necessary to deliver an extended discourse on prayer while simultaneously engaging in its practice through scriptural exposition.

After establishing this familiar theological territory for his audience, Augustine articulates the dynamic relationship between prayer and Christology with remarkable precision: "The one sole savior of his body is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who prays for us, prays in us, and is prayed to by us."[329] This tripartite formulation encapsulates Augustine's understanding of Christ's mediatorial role in Christian prayer. He subsequently elaborates this relationship through the complementary framework of priest, head, and God: "He prays for us as our priest, he prays in us as our head, and he is prayed to by us as our God."[330] This theological structure becomes the

[329] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.1
[330] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.1

interpretive lens through which Augustine approaches the practice of prayer throughout the remainder of the sermon.

The *totus Christus* motif functions not merely as an abstract theological concept but as a lived reality that Augustine seeks to make tangible for his congregation. He reinforces this framework periodically throughout the exposition, ensuring that his audience maintains awareness of their Christological identity. Beyond the initial priest-head-God formulation, Augustine develops the complementary dynamic of "servant" and "Lord," noting that Christ "is speaking in the person of a servant, and you, who are a servant, are speaking in the person of your Lord."[331]

This Christological framework assumes particular significance when Augustine connects the congregational recitation of the psalm with the psalm's textual content. The performative dimension of the *totus Christus* emerges as Augustine instructs his congregation to recognize their voice within Christ's voice, both in the written text and in their communal proclamation of it. Augustine captures this performative element when he observes that "we, each of us in our measure, add our own contribution to the clamor of the whole body."[332] This statement reveals Augustine's understanding that Christian prayer involves active participation in the mystical body of Christ, where individual voices contribute to a unified chorus.

The pastoral implications of this Christological framework become evident when Augustine provides his most succinct articulation of the *totus Christus* in relation to prayer: "We pray, then, to him, through him and in him; we speak with him and he speaks with us. We utter in him, and he utters in us."[333] This formulation simultaneously addresses Augustine's Christological convictions and his understanding of the Christian life as pilgrimage. While Augustine does not explicitly introduce the pilgrim motif until later in the exposition, the theological foundation is established through this initial Christological framework. The recognition of one's voice as Christ's voice within the *totus Christus* necessarily implies an acknowledgment of one's position on the spiritual journey—moving toward Christ while not yet fully united with him in the heavenly homeland.

Augustine's pastoral sensitivity emerges as he presents the *totus Christus* not as an abstract theological doctrine divorced from spiritual practice, but as a source of comfort and encouragement for the Church. The Christological framework provides believers with assurance that their prayers are not isolated individual efforts but participation in Christ's own prayer life. As Augustine counsels

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[331] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.2
[332] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.5
[333] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.1

his congregation: "Accordingly we must recognize our voices in him, and his accents in ourselves."[334] This mutual recognition becomes a recurring theme that Augustine employs to provide pastoral comfort throughout the exposition.

The Reciprocal Dynamic of Prayer

Augustine's treatment of prayer's reciprocal nature in Psalm 85 demonstrates his sophisticated understanding of the spiritual mechanics underlying authentic Christian prayer. Unlike his more familiar metaphor of fanned fire found in other works, Augustine here employs the imagery of emptying and filling to express this fundamental dynamic. This rhetorical choice serves both pastoral and theological purposes, as Augustine seeks to reorient his congregation's understanding of spiritual satisfaction and material attachment.

Augustine's pastoral strategy becomes evident as he counsels: "Let God be your whole presumption; let your neediness be for him, that you may be filled with him; for whatever else you may have without him will leave you still more profoundly empty."[335] This instruction operates on multiple levels, simultaneously addressing the spiritual psychology of prayer and the theological anthropology underlying Augustine's understanding of human nature. The movement Augustine prescribes involves two essential stages: first, the recognition and cultivation of one's fundamental neediness before God; second, the subsequent filling that results from this acknowledgment of dependence.

The counter-intuitive nature of this spiritual dynamic receives particular emphasis in Augustine's exposition. Any attempt to satisfy one's deepest longings through created goods will result in intensified emptiness, while the deliberate cultivation of neediness before God paradoxically leads to divine satisfaction. Augustine articulates this principle with reference to prayer specifically: the more believers pour out their prayers to God in acknowledgment of their need, the more they are filled with God's presence and grace. This maintains the essential tension that characterizes Augustine's understanding of the Christian life—the simultaneous experience of "already" and "not yet" that defines the pilgrim's existence.

The reciprocal dynamic of prayer also encompasses the relationship between moral disposition and divine responsiveness. Augustine emphasizes that the efficacy of prayer depends

[334] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.1
[335] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.3

significantly upon the moral posture of the one praying, particularly the virtue of humility. He instructs his congregation that God "draws near to anyone who has been humbled, but distances himself from exalted people, unless they are the humbled ones whom he has himself exalted."[336] This teaching reflects Augustine's consistent emphasis on the priority of interior disposition over external circumstances in matters of spiritual significance.

Augustine's pastoral wisdom emerges in his treatment of socioeconomic status and spiritual pride. He acknowledges that material comfort often accompanies spiritual pride, while poverty may paradoxically lead to vanity. His resolution transcends social categories: "God thwarts the proud, whether they are clothed from head to foot in silk or in rags, but he grants grace to the humble, whether they own this world's wealth or nothing at all."[337] The locus of moral evaluation lies not in external circumstances but in the heart's disposition, for "God's scrutiny is conducted within: there he weighs, there he examines."[338]

The reciprocal relationship between prayer and moral transformation becomes explicit when Augustine declares, paraphrasing words from God: "Do you want to fix your prayer in my ears? Then fix my law in your heart."[339] This statement reveals Augustine's understanding that authentic prayer and ethical obedience exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Prayer that lacks moral foundation fails to reach God's ears, while moral behavior disconnected from prayer lacks spiritual vitality.

Augustine further develops the reciprocal dynamic through his treatment of Christian identity within the *totus Christus*. The tension between humility and confidence that characterizes authentic prayer reflects the broader tension of Christian existence. Augustine warns against both spiritual pride and false humility: "If you say you are holy by your own efforts, you are proud; on the other hand, if you, faithful in Christ, a member of Christ, deny that you are holy, you are ungrateful."[340] This delicate balance requires believers to maintain simultaneous awareness of their sinful condition and their elevated status as members of Christ's mystical body.

The pastoral application of this reciprocal understanding emerges when Augustine encourages his congregation to recognize their dignity within the *totus Christus*: "Take stock of your

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336 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.5
337 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.3
338 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.3
339 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.10
340 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.4

position, and claim your dignity, the dignity that flows from your head."[341] This instruction demonstrates how the reciprocal dynamic of prayer serves not only theological precision but also pastoral encouragement, enabling believers to approach God with both appropriate humility and confident assurance.

Prayer as Patience: The Reality of Distraction and Divine Forbearance

Augustine's treatment of prayer as an exercise in patience reveals his profound psychological insight into the actual experience of those who attempt to pray. Rather than presenting an idealized vision of prayer that might discourage struggling believers, Augustine acknowledges the universal experience of distraction and mental meandering that characterizes most human attempts at prayer. This honest assessment serves both diagnostic and therapeutic purposes within his pastoral strategy. Augustine's description of the praying heart demonstrates remarkable phenomenological precision:

> Let each one closely observe what goes on in the human heart, and see how our very prayers are for the most part so hindered by idle thoughts that the heart can scarcely stand before its God. It wants to take hold of itself so that it may stand, but somehow it runs away from itself, and can find no fence to shut itself in, nor barricades to constrain its flightiness and tendency to wander, so that it may stand still and be delighted with its God. Scarcely one such prayer comes its way amid a great deal of praying.[342]

This extended description serves multiple rhetorical and theological functions. Augustine provides his congregation with both validation for their struggles and a precise definition of authentic prayer. The image of the heart "standing before God" captures the essence of prayer as attentive presence, while the description of the "fugitive heart" acknowledges the universal human experience of mental distraction during prayer.

The theological significance of Augustine's analysis lies not merely in his diagnosis of the problem but in his understanding of divine patience as the solution. God's forbearance with imperfect prayers becomes a source of encouragement rather than discouragement: "God is patient because he puts up with all this from us, and still waits hopefully for a prayer from us so that he may make us perfect."[343] This divine patience extends beyond mere toleration to active appreciation of whatever authentic prayer emerges from the struggle with distraction.

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[341] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.4
[342] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7
[343] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7

Augustine's pastoral wisdom becomes evident in his assurance that divine patience exceeds human patience by an infinite degree. He employs the analogy of human conversation to illustrate this point: believers would not tolerate a conversation partner who constantly turned aside to speak with others, yet God patiently endures such distracted attention during prayer. Moreover, "When we give him one [prayer] he accepts it gratefully, and hearkens to it; he does not remember all the others that we may have poured out confusedly, but accepts that one which we ourselves could hardly detect."[344]

This understanding of divine patience leads Augustine to provide a more succinct definition of prayer that emphasizes its dialogical character: "Your prayer is a conversation with God."[345] However, Augustine does not envision an unstructured dialogue but rather conversation mediated through Scripture, particularly the psalms. The reciprocal nature of this scriptural conversation receives clear articulation: "when you read, God is speaking to you; when you pray, you are speaking to God."[346]

Augustine's emphasis on praying the Scriptures reflects his understanding that God provides believers with appropriate words for prayer, demonstrating divine mercy even in the provision of prayer's content. This scriptural foundation becomes particularly important when Augustine discusses the Lord's Prayer as the paradigmatic example of authentic prayer. Following the disciples' request to Jesus for instruction in prayer, Augustine consistently encourages his congregation to make the Lord's Prayer foundational to their spiritual practice.

The pedagogical function of the Lord's Prayer extends beyond providing specific petition content to shaping the believer's fundamental orientation toward God. Augustine counsels: "Pray for what the Lord taught you to pray for; pray as your heavenly teacher instructed you. Call upon God as God, love God as God; nothing is better than he is, so desire God himself, hunger for God."[347] This instruction weaves together multiple themes: the Lord's Prayer as foundation, the cultivation of appropriate desire, and the deepening of dependence upon God through prayer itself.

Augustine's treatment of patience in prayer also addresses the problem of suffering and delayed divine response. Rather than dismissing such experiences, Augustine reframes them as opportunities for spiritual development. He encourages his congregation: "Let your heart, your

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[344] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7
[345] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7
[346] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7
[347] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.7

Christian heart, your faithful heart, be built up by this experience."[348] Disappointment and delayed answers become occasions for deepening dependence upon God rather than reasons for abandoning prayer.

The pastoral counsel Augustine provides for times of spiritual difficulty reflects his commitment to Scripture as the primary resource for sustaining prayer: "Hurry back to the scriptures."[349] This advice demonstrates the circular relationship between Scripture reading and prayer that characterizes Augustine's spiritual theology. Scripture provides both the content for prayer and the encouragement necessary to persevere in prayer during difficult seasons.

Prayer as the Voice of Pilgrims

Augustine concludes his exposition with an explicit theological framework that situates prayer within the broader context of Christian pilgrimage. This pilgrim motif provides the ultimate interpretive key for understanding both the necessity and the limitations of prayer in the present age. Prayer emerges not as an optional spiritual exercise but as the characteristic voice of those who recognize their status as sojourners moving toward their true homeland.

Augustine's articulation of the pilgrim condition demonstrates his psychological and spiritual realism: "However well off we are here, we are not yet in that homeland whither we are hurrying to return. Anyone who enjoys being on pilgrimage is no lover of home; if our homeland is sweet to us, pilgrimage is bitter; and if pilgrimage is bitter, we are in trouble all day and every day."[350] This analysis reveals the essential tension that motivates authentic Christian prayer—the simultaneous recognition of present incompleteness and future hope.

The temporal limitation of prayer receives explicit treatment within this pilgrim framework. Augustine envisions a future state where the current necessity of prayer will be transcended: "When shall we be free of it? When we are delighted to be at home."[351] This eschatological perspective provides both encouragement for present struggles and proper theological context for understanding prayer's function. Prayer belongs specifically to the pilgrim condition and will eventually give way to unmediated fellowship with God.

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[348] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.9
[349] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.9
[350] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.11
[351] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.11

Augustine's description of the eschaton demonstrates his understanding of prayer's ultimate purpose: "labor and groaning will pass away; there will be supplication no longer, but only praise; there we shall sing 'Alleluia,' there 'Amen,' our voices harmonizing with the angels; there will vision be unclouded, love without satiety."[352] This vision serves multiple functions: it provides hope for struggling pilgrims, establishes proper priorities for present spiritual practice, and clarifies the relationship between temporal and eternal spiritual realities.

The evocative phrase "pilgrim's sighs" emerges from this eschatological context as Augustine's most memorable characterization of prayer. This description captures both the longing and the incompleteness that mark authentic Christian prayer. Prayer becomes the natural expression of souls who recognize their displacement from their true home and their dependence upon divine guidance for the journey.

Augustine's concluding synthesis demonstrates his homiletical skill as he weaves together all the major themes introduced throughout the exposition. The *totus Christus* framework receives renewed emphasis: "The Body is on its way to him, but also draws its life from him." The reciprocal dynamic appears in the relationship between divine initiative and human response: "It is one thing for him to bring you to the way, and another for him to lead you along it."[353] The theme of patience emerges in the recognition that divine guidance occurs gradually throughout the pilgrim journey rather than in a single transformative moment.

Augustine's pastoral methodology becomes evident as he demonstrates the practice of prayer while teaching about it. His concluding prayers serve as both instruction and example: "I am certainly on the way, Lord, your way, but lead me in it. And I will walk in your truth: with you to lead me I shall not go astray, but I will if you let go of me." This performative element reinforces his earlier teaching about the *totus Christus*—Augustine prays as both teacher and member of the mystical body, demonstrating the very practice he advocates.

The final pastoral injunction brings together theological instruction and practical application: "Pray, then, that he will not let you go, but will lead you to the very end." Augustine's explanation of divine guidance emphasizes both the constancy and the Christological focus of God's pastoral care: "How does he lead? By constantly admonishing, constantly giving you his hand... By giving us his

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[352] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.11
[353] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.15

Christ, he gives us his hand; in giving his hand, he gives his Christ. He leads us to his way by leading us to his Christ; he leads us in his way by leading us in his Christ."[354]

Conclusion

Augustine's exposition of Psalm 85 represents a sophisticated integration of Christological theology, spiritual psychology, and pastoral wisdom applied to the fundamental Christian practice of prayer. The four major themes examined—*totus Christus,* reciprocal dynamic, patience, and pilgrimage—converge to present prayer not as an isolated spiritual exercise but as the characteristic voice of the Church militant on its journey toward the Church triumphant.

The theological coherence of Augustine's presentation emerges most clearly in his consistent Christological focus. Whether addressing the nature of authentic prayer, the proper disposition for prayer, the reality of distraction in prayer, or the eschatological context of prayer, Augustine maintains that Christ serves simultaneously as the model, mediator, and ultimate object of Christian prayer. This Christological consistency provides both theological precision and pastoral comfort for believers struggling with the gap between prayer's ideal and their experienced reality.

Augustine's pastoral genius lies in his ability to address honestly the difficulties of prayer while providing theological resources for perseverance. His acknowledgment of distraction, his emphasis on divine patience, and his eschatological perspective combine to create a realistic yet hopeful framework for approaching prayer. Rather than minimizing the struggles inherent in the life of prayer, Augustine situates these struggles within the larger narrative of Christian pilgrimage, where present difficulties serve as indicators of future hope rather than evidence of spiritual failure.

The enduring significance of Augustine's treatment lies in its integration of theological sophistication with practical accessibility. His exposition demonstrates that profound theological reflection can serve immediate pastoral needs, while authentic spiritual practice requires solid theological foundation. The conversation between theological precision and spiritual practice that characterizes this exposition continues to offer resources for contemporary reflection on the nature and practice of Christian prayer.

For Augustine, the practice of prayer is bound up with the life of pilgrimage. He began the sermon saying, "We pray…to him, through him and in him," and will conclude the sermon with

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[354] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.15

similar language of the pilgrimage through life. "You lead us in him, and to him."[355] Prayer, in this sermon from Augustine is a conversation with God, a heart standing before God, and the heaving of pilgrim sighs.

When Proba asked pointedly what she should pray for, Augustine responded: "Pray for a happy life."[356] His definition of happiness was directly shaped by his understanding of Christian existence as pilgrimage. Turning to Psalm 27, he illustrated his pilgrim theology: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, one thing will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord to behold the beauty of the Lord."[357] For Augustine, prayer remains the pilgrim's characteristic activity—the voice of those who remember the Sabbath while still walking toward their rest.

[355] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.15
[356] Augustine, *Letter* 130.1
[357]Augustine, *Letter* 130.8.15*,* quoting Psalm 27:4

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Joy as Pilgrim Posture

Between 412 and 413, Augustine maintained an ongoing correspondence with Macedonius, the imperial vicar of Africa. In *Letter 155*, Augustine responds to a previous communication from Macedonius with a wide-ranging epistle addressing the duties and virtues required of Macedonius in his current post. While many scholars consider this letter a key text for understanding Augustine's political theology, it also reveals Augustine's critical perspective on the nature of a happy life in the present and the role of joy within that life.[358] Augustine encourages Macedonius to approach his work in this life with a view toward the next; his present labors are to be both informed by and formed for the future. More significantly, Augustine demonstrates to Macedonius that his life and work in the temporal realm do not merely anticipate the eternal—they participate in it now. Echoing themes present throughout his homiletical corpus, Augustine writes, "The philosophers…themselves wanted to construct a happy life for themselves and thought that they should procure it rather than pray for it, though only God gives it."[359] Augustine proceeds to show Macedonius that joy is both a gift to be received and a calling to embody. Had Macedonius attended Augustine's preaching, he would already have been familiar with this framework.

This chapter argues that Augustine's sermons consider joy as a pilgrim posture that both urges pilgrims forward to their end in Christ, while also strengthening them on the path to Christ that is Christ. The sermons of Augustine reveal his perspective on joy in a distinctive manner precisely when we understand joy not merely as descriptive of a future eschatological state, but as a present reality available to the pilgrim now. When Augustine preaches on joy, he seeks to move souls into a state of joy, encourage souls to make progress in joy, and thus, prepare souls for the final joy that is theirs in Christ. For Augustine, joy is not something deferred exclusively to the future; if it were, the pilgrim would have nothing to do but passively await its arrival. Instead, Augustine regularly exhorts his congregation to joy in the present. Through an examination of secondary literature, we will notice that these sermons challenge any characterization of Augustine as a dour saint and dispute interpretations that view his eschatological emphasis as primarily pessimistic toward earthly life. We will see they illuminate the relationship between present joy and

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[358] See, for example, Robert Dodaro, "Political and Theological Virtues in Augustine, Letter 155 To Macedonius," in Augustiniana, Vol. 54, No. 1/4 (2004), 431-474.
[359] Augustine, *Letter 155*.

eschatological joy. Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter will proceed with an examination of the secondary literature on Augustine and joy first, then move to the thematic exploration of Augustine's wider sermonic corpus. Through analysis of Augustine's sermons, particularly his Exposition on Psalm 145 and Psalm 86, this chapter demonstrates that while Augustine acknowledges the juxtaposition between this life and the next, his primary concern is not postponement, but progress made on the pilgrim journey. The chapter will close with a close reading of his Exposition of Psalm 123 and Psalm 83.

When we adjust our interpretive lens to recognize Augustine's exhortations to joy, we discover that Augustine positions joy on a continuum as part of the journey itself, not merely reserved for its destination. The key, as Augustine wrote to Macedonius while borrowing from Paul, is to "rejoice in hope" (Rom 12:12). While many scholars emphasize the hope that Augustine encourages, they often overlook his exhortation to rejoice. This chapter contends that for Augustine, joy is both a gift of God in Christ and a calling for Christians to participate in and cultivate eternal joy in the present as part of their pilgrim journey toward the source of joy itself. When we recognize Augustine's exhortation to joy, we understand joy in this life not merely as anticipation but as participation; not as preliminary joy but as *pilgrim joy*.

Scholarly Context and Approach

While philosophical themes of beatitude, the good life, and ultimate happiness constitute a tremendous body of scholarship far beyond the scope of this chapter, less scholarly attention has been devoted to joy in particular—not as a final condition or philosophical category, but as analogous to a passion or virtue operating in the present.[360] Nevertheless, several scholars have treated joy in Augustine as worthy of sustained attention. Some interpreters present Augustine as the dour theologian who defers all joy until the eschaton and emphasizes the misery of present life.[361]

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[360] See, for example, Wolterstorff discussing Augustine's relationship with eudaimonism, in the chapter titled "Augustine's Break with Eudaimonism" in Justice: Rights and Wrongs, and in the essay "Augustine's Rejection of Eudaimonism" in James Wetzel (ed.), Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149–66; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness,* Oxford University Press, 1993; for contemporary accounts of joy, see *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life,* edited by Miraslov Volf, Fortress Press, 2015; *The Joy of Humility: The Beginning and End of the Virtues,* edited by Drew Collins, Ryan McAnnally-Linz and Evan C. Rosa, Baylor University Press, 2023.
[361] Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19.

Others acknowledge that joy might be available now but argue that it is of such lesser quality and degree that the emphasis falls primarily on the discontinuity between the joy available to pilgrims in this life and the joy awaiting them in the next.

The Scholarly Debate: Augustine the Optimist versus Augustine the Pessimist

As we observed with Augustine's ecclesiology, scholarship remains divided between characterizations of Augustine as optimist or pessimist. Some scholars, including Thomas F. Dixon and Martha Nussbaum, view Augustine primarily as a pessimist hyper focused on the eternal at the expense of the temporal.[362] Others concede significant validity to this critique while nevertheless identifying various strains of optimism within Augustine's thought. This interpretive divide resurfaces when examining Augustine's conception of joy. Dixon, Nussbaum, and others emphasize primarily the discontinuity of joy—barely accessible in earthly terrain and fully available only to pilgrims in the heavenly realm. One might expect that Augustine's extensive treatment of joy would give pause to those who characterize him as pessimistic, but even here, interpreters emphasize discontinuity such that "true joy," and therefore most joy, remains entirely absent from this life.

Hannah Arend: Augustine The Dour Saint

A key figure portraying Augustine as the dour saint and purveyor of misery is Hannah Arendt. As previously noted, Arendt contends that Augustine transforms the world into a "desert" through his thought, including his understanding of both the human condition and the corresponding absence of joy.[363] While Arendt correctly observes that "the fulfillment and end of desire is enjoyment. This is the goal toward which love aims and which constitutes happiness. Happiness is achieved when all striving has come to an end," she narrows her focus entirely to the eschatological framework.[364] Although Augustine's sermons and treatises indeed emphasize the eschatological nature of joy, Arendt entirely misses the present reality and possibility of joy in this life. For Arendt, Augustine is

362 Thomas F. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
363 Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 17.
364 Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 22.

not merely pessimistic—he is devoid of joy. She writes, "In longing for and desiring the future, we are liable to forget the present, to leap over it."[365]

Assuming Arendt borrows this imagery of leaping from Augustine himself, she fundamentally misunderstands it. As Augustine preaches in his exposition of Psalm 83, which we will examine more fully below, the heart and flesh of the pilgrim "leap for joy here toward that other place."[366] Arendt suggests that Augustine encourages pilgrims to leap *over* this world in favor of the next, consistent with her claims about Augustine making a "desert of this world." She fundamentally misinterprets the imagery, however. The heart and flesh of the pilgrim do not leap *over* this world; they leap *for joy in it*. They are not removed from the world—as if such removal were possible—but embedded within it. The key, like Augustine's otherworldly ecclesiology, is recognizing his encouragement of otherworldly joy.

This joy transcends mere understanding of eternity within the temporal; it exists as present reality. As Augustine notes in his sermon on the subsequent psalm, the leaping occurs not *from* anything but *within* the present framework. He illustrates with a traveler abroad, separated from home and unaware of their history or family. Word reaches this pilgrim from a courier that they are the "son of a senator," whose "father enjoys an ample fortune on your family estate," and the courier has arrived to "summon you home to him." Augustine concludes the illustration: "What a transport of joy that would be, assuming that the one who made the promise was not lying!"[367]

Arendt correctly identifies joy as a kind of transport, but whereas she perceives joy as transport *out of* this world and life, Augustine exhorts his congregation to adopt the language and posture of the psalms as their own *within* this life, and thus to be transported in the present. As many psalms encourage, Augustine exhorts his congregation to leap for joy *here*, in this world. As with desire, the question regarding joy is neither spatial nor moral in Arendt's sense but one of orientation, and most importantly, of movement. The pilgrim is oriented in this life toward the next; therefore, they are exhorted to leap for joy here and now in view of there and then – more precisely, to leap here and now *toward* that final end. This metaphor expresses both an orientation on the journey and movement toward the heavenly city. The pilgrim leaps for joy because they have learned

365 Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 31.
366 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.8.
367 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.7.

and been taught Augustine's central preaching theme: "You have a home, you have a homeland, you have a father."[368]

Whereas Arendt suggests virtually no continuity between the virtue of joy in this life and the promise of joy in the next, most contemporary scholars acknowledge continuity between the two, albeit with particular emphasis on limiting factors.

Christian Tornau: "Provisional Happiness"

In his contribution to *The Quest for the Good Life: Ancient Philosophers on Happiness*, Christian Tornau examines Augustine on virtue, self-sufficiency for happiness, and Augustine's relationship to other philosophers on happiness.[369] Tornau begins by comparing similarities between Augustine and other philosophers, notably Cicero and the tradition of ancient eudaimonism. He proceeds to identify Augustine's deviations, noting two distinct categories: "First, he firmly denied the possibility of happiness in this life and limited it to the life of the blessed after the resurrection, thus giving happiness a decidedly eschatological character. …Second, especially in his later years, he came to regard happiness exclusively as a gift of divine grace."[370] Tornau focuses his remaining analysis on this deviation, specifically examining virtue's role in this life and its connection to the next. Controversially, Tornau argues that "Augustine introduces a second or provisional form of happiness to correspond to virtue on this side of the eschaton."[371]

Tornau correctly observes that "love (*caritas*) and hope (*spes*) (and, presumably, faith), are the ingredients of the Christian's happiness even before he sees God 'face to face'."[372] He helpfully notes that "grace is not the reward of virtue but rather its presupposition," locating all virtue, including joy, as divine gift. For our purposes, this notion of "provisional happiness" demands attention. Tornau helpfully connects joy to love and hope as virtues linking this life to the next. Joy, like love and hope, remains accessible to Christians in the present precisely through "love of God, which in a sense already 'has' God."[373] Contrary to entirely pessimistic claims about Augustine,

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368 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.7.
369 Christian Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," in *The Quest for the Good Life: Ancient Philosophers on Happiness*, ed. Øyvind Rabbås et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 265-280.
370 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 267.
371 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 268.
372 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 270.
373 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 271.

Tornau observes that "being 'happy in hope' falls short of being 'really happy' (*re beatus*), but it is equally opposed to being wretched."[374] Thus, he argues, "this happiness is provisional but real."[375]

The concept of provisional joy, while helpful, remains incomplete. First, it fails to adequately represent the continuity that Tornau himself acknowledges, instead lending toward a picture of joy that is either temporary or destined for transformation. For Augustine, however, the joy accessible to pilgrims is partial, yet identical to the joy they will one day know in fullness. It is not different joy—as it derives from the same source—but simply cannot be fully apprehended and appreciated by pilgrims until they reach the heavenly city. Second, while Tornau correctly quotes Saint Paul (1 Cor 13:12) and notes Augustine's frequent citation of this verse, he fails to reckon with the "now and not yet" quality inherent in that formulation. Tornau misses that Paul's text is often misunderstood. Emphasis typically falls on the "then" in the verse's second half, but Augustine, especially in his sermons, exhorts his people to recognize the "now." While the pilgrim's sight remains "through a glass darkly," it is sight nonetheless—incomplete, but visible. The eyes of faith, after all, are "better and more powerful eyes, eyes with longer range."[376] In the sermons and exhortations to joy, we observe Augustine focusing his lens on praying for eyes of faith and practicing joy as a result.

Sarah Catherine Byers: "Preliminary Joy"

Sarah Catherine Byers also recognizes the importance of joy for Augustine.[377] She understands joy as, in part, a "preliminary emotion" within Augustine's broader cognitive psychology.[378] While her task involves comparison with Stoic theory rather than comprehensive taxonomy of Augustinian joy, she nevertheless both clarifies and complicates Augustine's use of joy. Byers identifies this category of preliminary joy in both *City of God* and various sermons, notably when Augustine compares Sarah with Abraham and Zachariah with Mary. She connects joy to doubt, which must, she argues, be preliminary since it represents imperfected joy en route toward virtue. Her descriptive account helpfully fills out the complex nature of Augustine's joy descriptions, but this description

374 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 271.
375 Tornau, "*Happiness in this life*," 271.
376 Augustine, *Sermon* 88.6.
377 Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
378 Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation*, 142.

misses our emphasis on exhortation. While "preliminary joy" may prove taxonomically useful, it fails to account for how Augustine encourages listeners to progress beyond preliminary joy toward full joy in the life of faith. Byers concerns herself with describing Augustine's use of preliminary joy but thereby misses joy's description as something to be nurtured and cultivated. Similarly, Byers overlooks joy as gift and grace, as noted above. Perhaps the focus on cognitive psychology blunts the sermonic exhortation's force for Byers; if we adjust the lens slightly toward exhortation, Augustine's use of joy appears in richer, more robust light. Byers's taxonomy would have benefited from including Augustine's conception of pilgrim joy.

Sarah Stewart-Kroeker: "Anticipatory Joy"

Whereas Arendt views Augustine as largely joyless, Tornau refers to Augustine's "provisional joy," and Byers to his "preliminary joy," Sarah Stewart-Kroeker prefers "anticipatory joy."[379] Drawing from Augustine's *Expositions on the Psalms* generally and his sermon on Psalm 36 particularly, Stewart-Kroeker identifies the pilgrimage theme throughout the sermon and its relationship to joy. For Stewart-Kroeker, the ordering of emotions—central to Augustine—includes proper orientation to and in joy. This orientation maintains continuity with eschatological joy because it "responds to the same object of love and contemplation, whether on earth or in heaven—God, whose truth, goodness, and beauty elicit delight."[380] This response centers on the "wordless cry of jubilation" that serves as the "affective point of contact" between this world and the next.[381]

Like Tornau and Byers, Stewart-Kroeker emphasizes the continuity of joy between this life and the next. Nevertheless, in her article "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," Stewart-Kroeker pays particular attention to discontinuity between the two, framing the bulk of her essay by carefully examining differences between earthly and heavenly joy.[382] Her main thesis in articulating joy accessible to pilgrims in this life identifies the "wordless cry" as coming closest to crossing into eternal joy. Joy, she writes, "responds to the same object of love and contemplation" whether "here

[379] Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation: Joy and the Limits of Language in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 2 (2015): 286-307.
[380] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 291.
[381] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 292.
[382] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 288-295.

on earth or in the heavenly realm"—namely, "God, whose truth, goodness and beauty elicit delight."[383]

Taking cues from the psalms and noting their importance in Augustine's life and witness, whereas Arendt observes leaping for joy, Stewart-Kroeker focuses on the cry of joy. Pilgrims can cry for joy in this life when the "hoped-for joy that crowns the earthly moral life" emerges, and this wordless cry serves as the "point of affective contact."[384] This contact concerns how pilgrims "perceive themselves in time."[385] Joy and its inverse, anxiety, "respond to true (or false) perceptions of time and, when rightly ordered, eternity."[386] For Stewart-Kroeker, the psalmic sermon exhortations concern entirely this perception—a matter of understanding. Pilgrims understand their temporal location and thus register or fail to register joy. "Expressions of joy, then, reflect one's understanding of providence, hope in promise of redemption, and love for whom one places one's faith."[387]

What remains absent from Stewart-Kroeker's taxonomy, yet present in Augustine's joy sermons, is grace. Joy emerges not merely from pilgrim understanding or intellectual capacity. These elements certainly participate, but Stewart-Kroeker's account misses joy as gift. As Augustine writes in his sermon on Psalm 88: "Well then, if you have understood that grace is something to make you shout for joy, listen now as the psalm speaks of grace more explicitly. Blessed the people that knows how to shout with joy, yes, to be sure; but what kind of joy is this? See if it is not delight in grace, delight in God, and no delight whatever in yourself."[388] The connections between grace, hope, and humility remain integral to Augustine account of joy. Joy is accessible to pilgrims as a practice to pursue, but also available as a gift to receive.

While Stewart-Kroeker correctly identifies both continuity and discontinuity in Augustine's joy conception, adjusting the lens slightly reveals dual exhortation to both *be* and *do*. One is to be joyful, and one is to practice joy. The true "affective point of contact" is not simply a "wordless cry"

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[383] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 291.
[384] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 294.
[385] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 295.
[386] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 295.
[387] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 296.
[388] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 88.1.7.

but the Holy Spirit.[389] The Spirit calls forth praise songs, calls forth joy's practice, calls forth in pilgrims the attunement to reality that sings.[390]

Stewart-Kroeker notes ways joy continues from the present into eternity, but the bulk of her article focuses on temporal-eternal discontinuities. Her careful attention to both deserves recognition. She correctly points out that Augustine does not envision a "moral imperative to cheerfulness,"[391] as cursory sermon examination demonstrates. Instead, she helpfully frames joy as the "crown" of "earthly moral life" that guides that same life.[392] The psalms remain critical for Augustine, and Stewart-Kroeker rightly notes their importance. She focuses on the "therapy for human affective life" offered in the psalms,[393] and while she and Michael Fiedrowicz are certainly correct in this observation, the framework obscures the psalms' role as "grammar of Augustine's sermons."[394] Thus, the psalms constitute the grammar Augustine both speaks and teaches his congregation to speak.

The time-eternity difference appears glaring, Stewart-Kroeker observes, such that "Augustine constantly exhorts believers to see present worries and afflictions, as well as desires and delights, in light of temporal finitude."[395] Thus, for Stewart-Kroeker, Augustinian exhortation remains primarily perceptual. Indeed, "many of the affective exhortations in these texts have to do with how human beings perceive themselves in time."[396] Elsewhere, Stewart-Kroeker notes that "attunement to a certain view of reality results in a certain identity: for Augustine, that of a pilgrim."[397] This connection proves most helpful, establishing the critical link between time and eternity as journey from one toward the other. As noted elsewhere, believers must recognize both their identity as pilgrims of the heavenly city and their temporal location—en route but not yet home. She mentions believers' backward-looking discontent and forward-looking anxiety, both disordered and wrongly attuned to reality. Joy, Stewart-Kroeker observes, responds not only to joy's

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389 "For this joy is within, where the sound of praise is both sung and heard; by this sound he is praised who is to be loved gratuitously with the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind and who sets his lover ablaze for himself by the grace of his holy Spirit." Augustine, *Letter* 140.17.44

390 "It is in him therefore that we must find our joy. No human being may claim for himself what belongs to God;14 from him comes the joy that makes us happy." Augustine, *Sermon* 149.4.

391 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 298.

392 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 299.

393 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 290.

394 Michael Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus Vox Totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins Exposition of Psalm* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 245.

395 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 302.

396 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 303.

397 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 304.

source but to "true (or false) perceptions of time and, when rightly ordered, eternity."[398] The psalms serve as key drivers of this eternal orientation, properly forming and ordering emotions. Her focus remains on the "wordless cry," which responds to each as that which "transcends the spoken word" and even transcends time.

While this lens certainly adds helpfully to a growing understanding of the complexity of joy in Augustine, adjusting the lens slightly toward other aspects of joy—particularly how he frames it as exhortation—reveals different patterns than those mentioned. Being attuned to reality must certainly exceed cognitive perception. While true that "expressions of joy…reflect one's understanding of providence, hope in promise of redemption, and love for whom one places one's faith,"[399] what remains notably missing from that taxonomy is, once again, grace.

The joy of hope, springing from God himself, is not merely a calling but a gift, as we shall see. The sermonic exhortation calls not simply to perceive future joy but to experience present joy in Christ. This joy exists in time now and thus both transcends time and dwells within it. The eternal remains accessible to creatures through the temporal. Contingent beings do not rise above this present life but walk through it as pilgrims. As Isabelle Bochet observes, "In the Augustinian optic, one goes to the eternal by the temporal…"[400] However, whereas Bochet continues "…more than one finds the eternal within the temporal," I argue it is not either-or but both. For Augustine, one finds eternal joy within the temporal by the temporal en route to the eternal. The ultimate source of joy exists outside the temporal but comes crashing through in Christ. Therefore, if the temporal and eternal meet in Christ, so too does Christian joy. Augustine can thus declare: "What of you, who amid all these difficulties and human sinfulness are groaning now, you who are troubled in the flesh but joyful in heart? What is your hope, O body of Christ?"[401] The body of Christ, like its head, can be troubled in flesh yet joyful in heart while inhabiting this temporal realm. While Stewart-Kroeker helpfully frames her entire article around pilgrims' association in joy, she misses this particular focus.[402]

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398 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 295.
399 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 296.
400 Isabelle Bochet, "Le firmament de l'Écriture": L'herméneutique augustinienne* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2004), 428 as quoted by Michael Cameron, "Augustine and Scripture" in Mark Vessey, ed., *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
401 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.24.
402 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 286-307.

The eschatological feature of joy, as Stewart-Kroeker notes, shares continuity with earthly reality, and thus exists on a continuum. Yet proper attunement to reality transcends mere perception, for Augustine also exhorts believers to specific practices. As demonstrated below, practices beyond psalmic prayer cultivate joy in pilgrim life. Whereas Stewart-Kroeker focuses on the exhortation within Augustine's descriptive elements, she misses the prescriptive toward key practices. For Augustine, joy is not merely something God elicits but something God expects and enjoins.

Margaret R. Miles: Sermons versus Treatises

A constructive contribution to the joy conversation emerges, perhaps unexpectedly, from scholarship focused not on joy but on Augustine's doctrine of election. In her article "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," Margaret R. Miles makes several productive contributions to our present discussion.[403] Miles astutely notes that Augustine's sermons differ from his treatises in both form and content—intentionally so, Miles argues, as they serve different purposes. Whereas treatises may lend themselves to technical precision, Augustine's sermons aim less for precision than for conviction. Sermons were designed to "encourage listeners' beliefs."[404] While this point may appear truistic, its importance cannot be overstated, as it is often overlooked. Therefore, when Augustine mentions joy in his sermons, particularly with an exhortational tone, his goal involves encouraging listener beliefs toward the joy he proclaims. The exhortation in these sermons is for the soul to move toward joy and forward in joy.

Similarly, Miles observes that typical Augustine sermons do not merely deliver abstract doctrinal content but actively shape both pilgrim belief and practice. Regarding the doctrine of election, for example, she notes: "Certainly, his congregation was attracted by the hope of eternal life, yet their present affections and actions also matter in substantial ways that Augustine's doctrinal writings do not fully describe."[405] The same applies to joy. Contrary to pessimistic interpretations—one thinks again of Arendt, Dixon, Nussbaum, and others—Augustine's sermons belie simplistic understanding of a dour theologian obsessed with sin and sexuality, especially as we observe him exhorting his congregation to joy. Similarly, Miles notes that contrary to purely or even primarily

403 Margaret R. Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," *Augustine Studies* 32, no. 1 (2001): 35-52.
404 Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," 38.
405 Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," 40.

negative present assessments Augustine is often accused of, his sermons reveal "attentiveness to the urgency of the present."[406] The call to joy, as part of a more general exhortation to virtue, proves urgent and itself requires urgency.

Miles quotes Augustine's homily on John 54.8 to illustrate an important metaphor. In that homily, Augustine comments on the "eternity of the nativity" of truth: "It has aroused us to a great desire for its inner sweetness, but we seize it by growing, we grow by walking, we walk by making progress, so that we may be able to arrive at it."[407] While Miles somewhat diminishes these lines by depicting Augustine's "Christian life as a walk with friends," thereby missing the pilgrimage motif it evokes, she nevertheless correctly notes the implications. "Augustine's walking metaphor emphasizes the on-going practice of Christian life,"[408] she writes, demonstrating the importance of practices in the Christian life generally and joy-cultivating practices particularly. Miles observes that Christian faith, as pilgrim faith, is embodied faith; in the exhortation to joy we see encouragement to transform joy from abstract principle into embodied reality within the pilgrim journey.

Vernon Bourke and Nicholas Wolterstorff: The Optimism-Pessimism Frame

In his 1978 lecture "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," Vernon Bourke asks pointedly of Augustine: "Was he fundamentally a pessimist about the condition of mankind, or was he rather a cautious optimist?"[409] This appears to be the primary framework much contemporary scholarship employs when approaching Augustine on joy, but it frames the question incorrectly. The issue for Augustine, as observed in his sermons, is what proves appropriate to the pilgrim journey. Augustine is sometimes descriptive of the pilgrim way and other times prescriptive of proper pilgrim conduct. Joy constitutes one intersection of both. While Bourke and others frame the question around joy and happiness—which one?—Augustine frames the issue around *what kind*. Joy is both temporal and eternal, both gift and calling, both something to be received and goal toward which pilgrims are exhorted to work.

Nicholas Wolterstorff represents another scholar emphasizing joy's discontinuity and Augustine's eschatological emphasis while excluding meaningful continuity. Drawing from the

406 Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," 42.
407 Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 54.8, quoted in Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," 44.
408 Miles, "Augustine on God's *Intus* Activity," 44.
409 Vernon Bourke, "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," *Augustinian Studies* 9 (1978): 61.

Confessions, Wolterstorff argues that Augustine maintains points of contact and departure from ancient eudaimonists, and that "by the term 'joy' Augustine clearly meant a certain experiential state."[410] He argues for departure in that "What Augustine meant by 'happiness' was thus much closer to what we today mean by the term than it was to what the ancient eudaimonists meant by *eudaimonia* or *beatitudo*."[411] Linking joy with desire, Wolterstorff notes that Augustine argues each human being desires "a life whose experiential quality was joy" whether they recognize it or however confusedly they pursue joy.

Several elements remain missing. First, as sermon evidence demonstrates, joy exceeds "a certain experiential state." While Wolterstorff focuses on the *Confessions*, one must ask whether the portrait of joy in the *Confessions* differs markedly from Augustine's congregational presentation through sermons, or whether Wolterstorff examines that portrait slightly out of focus. Adding sermons reveals joy as more than a description of an experiential state—it is an exhortation to a set of practices.

Similarly, Wolterstorff defines Augustine's conception of joy: "True joy is joy unalloyed by misery. True joy is also enduring joy, joy not followed by misery. And true joy is deep, not shallow, the deepest joy available to a human being."[412] With this definition, the joy Wolterstorff identifies in the *Confessions* and thus in Augustine generally becomes joy necessarily delayed until the end of this temporal life. Nevertheless, he recognizes that true joy differs from "just being free of sorrow and toil." Augustine's joy conception includes nuance "beyond release from misery."[413] Wolterstorff then emphasizes not just the negative absence of misery that lies at the heart of joy, but the positive corollary that joy has as its source union with God. For Wolterstorff, "We experience true joy when, as Augustine puts it in the very last section of the *Confessions*, we are admitted to the great holiness of God's presence (13.38)."[414] Therefore, true joy remains delayed until the ultimate end of earthly sorrow and the ultimate union of heaven and earth because joy must exceed personal experience and reference reality beyond self. "That raises the question: is true joy impossible here in this life? It is impossible. Only in the life to come will true joy be ours."[415] This proves true both because

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[410] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions on Desire for Happiness," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 139.
[411] Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions," 140.
[412] Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions," 143.
[413] Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions," 144.
[414] Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions," 145.
[415] Wolterstorff, "Augustine's Confessions," 146.

individual reformation remains incomplete until the end and because "joy unalloyed by misery" becomes possible only when nothing remains to cause misery.

However, had Wolterstorff engaged Augustine beyond the *Confessions*, he would quickly observe that if true joy remains unavailable in this life, as he contends, then Augustine exhorts his congregation to the impossible.[416] This represents either foolish pastoral strategy, clerical malpractice, or a misreading of Augustine's conception of joy. Given Wolterstorff's established definition of joy, one must conclude the latter. However, adjusting our lens—both widening it to include sermons and focusing on those sermons' exhortation—reveals the availability of joy to pilgrims now, even if partially out of focus until Christ's return. "True joy" is not "impossible" in this life, for God does not promise what he does not also provide. Had Wolterstorff adjusted his definition slightly—perhaps referring to "final joy" as possible only in the life to come—it would prove more amenable to sermonic exhortation. Suggesting "true joy" remains entirely delayed demands of joy what Augustine does not. As we will see, true joy is accessible in this life as its source is God. It represents no false, pretend, or even provisional joy. It is pilgrim joy.

Joseph Clair: The Horizontal Complement

Perhaps the most helpful corrective to frameworks often posited around Augustine and joy comes from Joseph Clair. In *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine*, Clair's project, not unlike my own, prioritizes mining Augustine's sermons and letters first, only subsequently turning to more formal theological treatises to complete his account.[417] Through this methodology, Clair discovers a nuanced Augustine, especially regarding moral and ethical reasoning. Through those letters and sermons, Clair identifies Augustine's central themes: the good life, the ordering of loves, and the soul's ascent. He also discovers "a horizontal complement for the ascent of the soul."[418] This horizontal complement appears in Augustine's ground-level ethical and moral reasoning in real-life situations found in the life of his congregation and his correspondence. Thus, Clair's work allows a more nimble Augustine to appear—one, I would press further, that demonstrates more pastoral presence in theological sensibilities than exclusively academic and abstract ones.

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416 This critique applies equally to Werner Beierwaltes's similar conclusions in "Augustine's Concept of Happiness," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 61-82.
417 Joseph Clair, *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
418 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 87.

For our purposes, Clair's perceptive insights into Augustine's letters and sermons reveal that "Augustine's vision of obtaining eternal goods involves a process in which the practice of virtues in this life begins to mirror more directly the way virtues will exist in eternity."[419] Clair's analysis thus corroborates the present study's contention that eternal goods operate within temporal frameworks through dynamic continuity rather than mere dialectical opposition. The "concrete cases" found in his sermons and letters better showcase the Augustinian dimension, Clair argues, that "properly ordering one's loves…requires an integration of ontological, social, and psychological dimensions."[420] This conception of virtue as instrumental to obtaining eternal goods coheres with this study's argument that joy functions simultaneously as divine gift and moral imperative. Clair's analysis substantiates my contention that joy constitutes an eternal good accessible within temporal existence, a reality most clearly discernible through Augustine's homiletical exhortations. The bishop can only rightly exhort his congregation to joy in the present if it correlates both to the larger practice of virtue and has a referent in eternity.

Drawing from Letter 220, Clair finds in this correspondence with Boniface that "the virtues are both the way toward obtaining eternal goods and are themselves eternal goods."[421] Similar to the sermons, Clair discovers in this letter an exhortation to virtue. "Augustine exhorts Boniface to 'win and keep' eternal goods by cultivating particular virtues—almsgiving, fasting, making good use of temporal goods."[422] Through this letter particularly, Clair arrives at the penetrating insight that eternal goods are something "human beings are able to comprehend and pursue them—and sometimes even obtain and experience them—in this life."[423] Joy, therefore, should not merely be pursued as delayed eschatological promise but instead proves possible to "even obtain and experience" in this life. The way to obtain and experience these eternal goods, as stated above, involves "a process in which the practice of the virtues in this life begins to mirror more directly the way the virtues will exist in eternity."[424] Joy, then, is both a virtue that will exist in eternity and a practice one engages en route to eternity. Thus Clair perceives joy on the continuum I have argued for. The continuum exists because God serves as both source and summit of these eternal goods, and as Clair notes, pilgrim life involves gradual "return to God as the dual source of all virtues and

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419 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 156.
420 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 156-157.
421 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 168.
422 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 168.
423 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 169.
424 Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 156.

temporal goods."[425] Thus, through time en route to eternity, eternal goods such as joy can be experienced both now and in eternity. Christian joy represents difference in degree, not kind.

Toward Pilgrim Joy

This survey of scholarship reveals a consistent pattern: while most interpreters acknowledge some form of continuity between present and eschatological joy, they tend to emphasize rather a discontinuity, limitation, and postponement. Whether characterized as "provisional" (Tornau), "preliminary" (Byers), or "anticipatory" (Stewart-Kroeker), these interpretations fail to adequately account for Augustine's consistent exhortation to joy in his sermonic corpus. As Clair's methodology demonstrates, prioritizing Augustine's pastoral voice through sermons and letters reveals a more nuanced understanding than treatise-focused approaches typically yield.

The scholarly debate between Augustine the optimist and Augustine the pessimist misframes the fundamental question. Augustine's concern is neither optimistic nor pessimistic assessment of present conditions but appropriate orientation for the pilgrim journey. Joy constitutes neither mere consolation prize for delayed gratification nor preliminary emotion en route to "real" joy. Instead, Augustine's sermonic exhortations reveal joy as what I term "pilgrim joy"—genuine participation in eternal reality made accessible through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, experienced within the temporal journey toward the eternal city.

This pilgrim joy transcends the optimism-pessimism debate by recognizing that Augustine's exhortational rhetoric assumes present possibility. As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, Augustine does not exhort his congregation to an impossible ideal of joy but to practices that cultivate genuine joy rooted in grace and oriented toward God. The key insight from Miles regarding sermonic versus treatise methodology, combined with Clair's attention to the horizontal complement in Augustine's ethics, provides the interpretive framework necessary for understanding how Augustine can simultaneously emphasize eschatological fulfillment while exhorting present joy. We now turn to examine this dynamic in Augustine's specific psalm expositions.

The Dual Nature of Pilgrim Joy: Gift and Calling

[425] Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 172.

Having established the inadequacy of existing scholarly frameworks for understanding Augustine's approach to joy, we can now examine how Augustine presents joy in his sermons as both divine gift and human calling. This dual nature distinguishes Augustine's "pilgrim joy" from the various limited interpretations surveyed above. Unlike "provisional," "preliminary," or "anticipatory" joy, pilgrim joy represents genuine participation in eternal reality made accessible through grace while simultaneously requiring active cultivation through spiritual practices. Augustine's sermonic exhortations reveal joy as neither delayed consolation nor mere emotional state, but as grace-enabled virtue that must be both received and practiced on the soul's movement in the journey toward God.

Participatory Joy in the Totus Christus

Two brief test cases will illustrate the central argument before proceeding to a more comprehensive examination of two additional, and more extensive, Augustinian sermons. First, the opening of a sermon on Psalm 145, and second, a brief theological aside in a sermon on Psalm 86. For Augustine, God constitutes the spring of joy, and as Christians encounter and experience God in this life, authentic joy becomes available to them.[426] Specifically, this joy connects to the body of Christ—it is *as* the body of Christ that joy becomes accessible. For those who exist in Christ, participating in the *totus Christus*, the joy of the Lord already constitutes their strength, even as one day their weak hands and feeble knees will be fully strengthened.[427] Joy is not merely anticipatory, nor provisional, nor even simply preliminary, but is properly participatory. The pilgrim participates in Christ's joy presently while awaiting its eschatological fullness.

Psalm 145: The Psalms as Point of Contact

In his sermon on Psalm 145, Augustine weaves together many of these theological insights. The psalms themselves serve as the authentic point of contact between the divine and human. "The songs God has inspired are the delight of our spirit, and we cannot weep over them except with tears of joy."[428] These psalms, inspired by God, are spoken back to God. The voice of the *totus*

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426 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.1. For Augustine's understanding of God as the source of joy, see Carol Harrison, "Augustine and the Art of Music," in *Augustine and the Disciplines*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142-167.
427 Cf. Nehemiah 8:10; Isaiah 35:3.
428 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.2.

Christus prays back God's own words to their divine source. Augustine exhorts his congregation not merely to pray this psalm but to allow it to indwell their spirit, touched by the Spirit. "Allow the words of God to seize your heart, and let him who owns you claim your minds as his rightful possession, so that they may not turn aside to any other end."[429] Here Augustine addresses both intellect and passions, both understanding and desire, in the integrated response of the whole person to divine revelation.

From this foundation, as if to anticipate contemporary scholars like Hannah Arendt who assume Augustine exhorts his congregation to "leap over the present," he preaches: "Each one of you should be wholly present here, yet in such a way that you are also not here. What I mean is this: we must be so entirely present to the word of God which sounds here on earth that we are exalted by it, and are no longer held by the earth."[430] Far from leaping over the present, Augustine exhorts his congregation to be "wholly present here" while simultaneously not confined to earthly limitations. The exaltation Augustine envisions involves the freedom of the soul, liberated from the *viscum* that calcifies on the wings of love and faith, enabling them to leap and fly in joy.[431] Both heart and flesh not only cry out wordlessly but serve as receptacles of the joy that God bestows. The pilgrim sings from this elevated joy, from the "place where you are truly alive," singing on this earth with the strength and words of heaven.[432]

Divine Initiative and Human Response

This elevation represents divine grace, for "God is with us in order that we may be with him; he who came down to us in order to be with us is at work now to draw us up to himself, so that we may be in his company."[433] The elevation of the heart constitutes a drawing up to God by God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. "The soul that has been given this hope can arise, for such hope necessarily implies joy. Even though we are beset with difficulties as far as this life is concerned, and tossed by storms and tempests, our soul can arise and stand up straight because it is

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[429] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.2.
[430] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.3. For the critique of Augustine's supposed temporal escapism, see Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 17-21.
[431] Augustine uses the metaphor of *viscum* (birdlime) frequently to describe earthly attachments that weigh down the soul's flight toward God. See *Confessions* 8.11.25.
[432] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.3.
[433] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.4.

joyful in its hope."[434] Augustine exhorts his congregation in this sermon to more than mere perspective or temporal awareness. He exhorts them to leap for joy—in their hearts, minds, bodies, and wills. Believers await final joy but are not denied authentic joy presently. Christians should be, Augustine preaches, like the psalmist who is "here in body, but far ahead in thought."[435] The pilgrim sends her desire ahead of her, with hope already dispatched as her anchor. She remains wholly present on earth, but with desire projected forward, the transport of joy brings her forward and carries joy back. The pilgrim must continue moving in joy toward final joy.

Psalm 86: The Semblance and the Reality

A crucial passage in Augustine's sermon on Psalm 86 (87) presents a test case in miniature for this interpretive framework. Returning to his characteristic theme of the pilgrimage of the heavenly city's citizens through this earthly realm, Augustine declares: "It is as though the home of all happy people—all those who have been gladdened—were in this city. During our pilgrimage we are worn out, but our home will be pure gladness."[436] This final home, toward which each pilgrim of the heavenly city journeys, represents a place of "pure gladness" and thus the ultimate destination of "all happy people." Acknowledging the toil and groaning appropriate to this present age with its sorrow and sighing, Augustine reminds his listeners that they will be happy people in that home of pure gladness because "he for whom we sigh now will be present to us, and we shall be like him."[437] From this description, Augustine transitions into prescriptive mode, declaring: "Let us prepare ourselves for a different joy, because here we find only a semblance of it, not the real thing."[438]

Interpretive Precision: Sign and Reality

This passage presents the greatest potential for misunderstanding. The exhortation to "prepare ourselves for a different joy" appears to suggest that joy's deferral into the future means Christians should passively await that joy, since any joy experienced presently represents "only a semblance" of

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[434] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.4.
[435] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 145.5.
[436] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.3.
[437] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.3; cf. 1 John 3:2.
[438] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.3.

that different joy and is "not the real thing." However, the broader context of the passage clarifies the detail and nuance of joy as both gift and calling, both present and future reality.

Augustine continues by reminding his listeners of the ultimate source of their happiness through a direct quotation from the psalm: "Blessed are they who dwell in your house; they will praise you for ever and ever."[439] The larger context suggests that by referring to the "different joy" as "not the real thing," Augustine does not establish a juxtaposition between what is authentic and what is counterfeit. Rather, he distinguishes between a sign and the thing signified, or more precisely, Augustine conceptualizes a continuum of joy. It cannot be that the joy present to the pilgrim is inauthentic joy, for he explicitly states in other sermons that "real joy is ours now."[440] Instead, Augustine sets the "different joy" within the context of the different city toward which pilgrims journey. In other words, Augustine promises his listeners an otherworldly joy in that otherworldly city, but they possess access to that otherworldly joy in this world, even if only experiencing a semblance of it. This joy is no less real, only less complete than the final joy will be. It remains a different joy, distinct from what the earthly city offers, precisely because its source and foundation originate from the heavenly city.

The Practice of Praise as Cultivation of Joy

With this context established, Augustine again exhorts his congregation to joy, this time through a practice that cultivates it. He declares: "Let us then praise the Lord now, as best we can, amid our present groaning, because by praising him we long for him whom we do not yet possess. When we possess him all groaning will be done away with, and there will remain only pure, eternal praise."[441] The exhortation to praise constitutes an exhortation to joy, for praise incites the heart to long more intensely for what it presently possesses only partially, but which one day it shall possess completely. Like praise, joy will be that which endures, pure and eternal.

It is within the central theological framework of pilgrimage that the complete tension of earthly and heavenly joy achieves its fullest expression. For Augustine, joy represents one of the fundamental states of the pilgrim, alongside love, that remains both accessible in this life and

[439] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.3.; Psalm 84:4 (Vulgate numbering).
[440] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.8.
[441] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 86.3.

continuous into the next.[442] Joy appropriate to this present age indeed differs from the joy existing in the age to come, but in his sermons Augustine consistently links the two. Adjusting our interpretive focus to emphasize continuity allows us to perceive Augustine's perspective on joy in distinctive ways. When we adopt this approach, we observe that for Augustine, joy functions both descriptively and prescriptively. It constitutes a unique bridge between the "now" of the pilgrim and the "not yet" of the one who arrives home. Joy spans the chasm between earthly sojourn and the rest that awaits. Because it accomplishes this bridging function, Augustine emphasizes this pilgrim state in two complementary ways. Thus, in his sermons, Augustine can exhort the pilgrim to joy as both a gift to be received and a calling to be cultivated.

Joy as Gift

For the pilgrim, joy is first a grace—a gift to be received, one that is "kept and consummated" by God, for God himself serves as the source, summit, and settlement of joy.[443] God constitutes both the object of joy and the spring from which it flows. Joy is given to the pilgrim now "in him," and while joy is partially given now, our "whole joy" is reserved for final glory.[444] God comforts us in and with joy on the pilgrim path amidst a life of sorrow and sighing for the final comfort yet to come. That comfort is itself a gift to be received. Similarly, God "sprinkles gladness upon us"[445] on this earthly sojourn, strengthening pilgrims to take further steps on the path toward final joy.

When Augustine exhorts his congregation to acknowledge joy as gift, he does so as a matter of perception. As Stewart-Kroeker observes, "Augustine constantly exhorts believers to see present worries and afflictions, as well as desires and delights, in light of their temporal finitude."[446] It constitutes a "great blessing to be in God's flock" – that is, the church – and thus a "very great joy."[447] Joy is not merely or even primarily individual; it is communal, ecclesial. Joy represents a gift to the pilgrim city as the common proclivity of its citizens. Augustine employs the image of maternal disposition toward a child to illustrate how joy functions in the lives of the faithful. Joy resulting

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[442] For Augustine's understanding of the theological virtues as pilgrim states, see John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 156-178.
[443] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.8.
[444] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 85.24.
[445] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.7.
[446] Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 302.
[447] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 79.2.

from hope – "nourishing us, suckling us, building us up"[448]—sustains weary travelers on the pilgrim path. If true joy ultimately represents God's gift found in God's presence, then it follows that joy is found penultimately in God's earthly presence through the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit's inner working confirms to pilgrims the joy of the Lord as their strength.

Joy as Calling

Joy is not merely a gift to be received, however; it is also a virtue to be cultivated. Throughout his sermons, Augustine provides various opportunities for pilgrims to cultivate joy in multiple ways on the faith journey. First, the call to joy constitutes a call to praise. "I praise God, and find joy in the very act of praising him; I delight to praise him…"[449] We not only exhibit joy when praising but are called to praise in and because of joy. In other words, joy in worship and praise is not merely a byproduct of internal disposition but a practice to be developed. The call to praise in joy understands worship as not merely expressive but formative.[450] Those who hope are to rejoice not merely when they feel inclined but in order to shape those feelings themselves. "Joy is an expansion of the spirit wrought with praise,"[451] such that it shapes and forms pilgrims, enlarging their hearts and making their souls more capacious to house both God's joy and the God of joy himself in his Spirit.

With God as joy's source, we learn to love what he loves—what is worthy of love, namely God himself. We learn to love "Christ and all his benefits," and learn to praise God in good times or bad.[452] Christians have learned not merely what it means to be content in all circumstances but how to be joyful and give praise whether in plenty or want. Christians are to "stand fast in joy"[453] and to "leap for joy toward that other place."[454] This leaping occurs in the heart, sending hope and joy far ahead to prepare the Lord's way.

Joy in Humility

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448 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 130.14.
449 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 91.1.
450 On Augustine's understanding of worship as formative rather than merely expressive, see Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89-105.
451 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 94.3.
452 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.19.
453 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.8.
454 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.8.

Similarly, pilgrims learn joy in humility. "Well then, if you have understood that grace is something to make you shout for joy, listen now as the psalm speaks of grace more explicitly. Blessed the people that knows how to shout with joy, yes, to be sure; but what kind of joy is this? See if it is not delight in grace, delight in God, and no delight whatever in yourself."[455] The exhortation encompasses both understanding and practice. Augustine calls his congregation to understand grace, allowing it to alter their perspective, but also to practice humility and joy together.

> Devoid of understanding they were, unlike the blessed people that knows how to shout with joy. Where should this blessed people find its delight, in what should it exult? In your name, of course, as it walks in the light of your countenance. It will deserve to be exalted, but in your righteousness alone. Let it cast aside its own righteousness and be humbled; then it will be open to God's righteousness, and will be exalted.[456]

Joy in Confession

Christians also learn joy through confession. Augustine notes confession's cathartic potential while recognizing that not only does humility require confession, but the more one confesses, the more humility is cultivated. Using a medical metaphor to illustrate his point, Augustine writes:

> You must therefore be sad before you confess; but once you have confessed, dance for joy, because now you have the prospect of healing. Your conscience had accumulated morbid matter, and a boil swelled up. It caused you agony and allowed you no rest. The physician applies the poultice of his words, and eventually lances it. He uses a medicinal knife to correct the trouble, and you must acknowledge the doctor's hand. Confess. Let all the pus come out and flow away in your confession; then dance for joy and be glad.[457]

Similar to worship generally, the posture of confession for Christians forms pilgrims in humility and joy simultaneously. It is not merely expressive but formative.

Avoiding False Joy

Alongside joy in confession is Augustine's negative warning to avoid "false joy."[458] By this, Augustine does not mean that true joy cannot be found in this life. Whereas Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that true joy is ultimately and only delayed, when Augustine exhorts his congregation to

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[455] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 88.1.7.
[456] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 88.1.8.
[457] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 37.14.
[458] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 4.7.

rejoice in hope and avoid false joys, he refers primarily to joy's source. For example, true joy is not found within the walls of the world because the world is not true joy's source. Finding joy within the world constitutes only false joy, but this does not imply that true joy cannot then be found within present life. Instead, as we shall see, true joy is found in Christ, even now. Similarly, true joy is found not *in* this world but *through* it. Avoiding false joy resembles avoiding false hope.[459] It is not that hope is absent from this life but that its source derives from the next. So too with joy. True joy is indeed accessible to pilgrims now; its completion, however, remains future.[460] The exhortation to avoid false joy is not a warning toward dour life in this present age but a warning to find joy, even now, at its proper and only source. False joy will perish; true joy lasts.

Joy in Prayer

Finally, Christians are to find and learn joy in prayer. While prayer represents one of the virtues that, unlike praise, will pass away, pilgrims still learn to avoid false joys and focus on what lasts and lingers through prayer.[461] Here too, we learn to love what is worthy of love as our desires are shaped by prayer's practice. As we saw in chapter 2, prayer is the pilgrim practice that nourishes and sustains pilgrims on the journey itself.

Grace and Gratitude: The Integration of Gift and Calling

While Augustine sometimes emphasizes joy as gift and at other times focuses on joy as a calling, in key situations he emphasizes both simultaneously. For example, in his exposition of Psalm 94, Augustine refers to the "banquet of joy in the Lord"[462] that is tasted now but will be fully appreciated in the life to come. Joy resembles an hors d'oeuvre or aperitif that nourishes in the present while simultaneously stimulating appetite for further joys to come. Similarly, Augustine employs the sabbath framework to exhibit joy's "now and not yet" character. The full sabbath awaits pilgrims when they arrive home and rest is complete, but sabbath is to be practiced now toward that

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459 On the relationship between true and false hope in Augustine, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 118-135.
460 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.9.
461 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 141.18.
462 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 94.15.

final end. A "tranquil joy born of hope"[463] results from sabbath in this life, while further tranquil joy born of rest results from sabbath in the life to come. Augustine exhorts his congregation not merely to receive tranquility but to be tranquil in joy. The exhortation cuts across the temporal sphere and perceives joy not merely as affective state but as disposition over which one exercises certain control.

Augustine envisions no mere cheerful disposition.[464] Rather, the "tranquil joy" born of hope is hard-fought and hard-won by those who know that "night demands patience, the day will give us joy."[465] Joy is both perspectival and to be practiced. The difference between joy and happiness for Augustine lies in the sorrow that can still be present in the former but remains absent in the latter. Happiness depends on circumstances, while deep, abiding joy depends only on God. As such, joy lingers into eternity, passing through this temporal age en route to glory.

This integration of gift and calling reveals Augustine's sophisticated understanding of grace and human agency. Joy represents neither pure passivity nor mere human achievement but grace-enabled response. The practices Augustine recommends—praise, humility, confession, prayer—do not earn joy but cultivate receptivity to the joy God continuously offers. This dynamic explains why Augustine can simultaneously exhort his congregation to joy while insisting that joy remains entirely God's gift. The exhortation itself represents grace in action, calling forth what God makes possible.

The "banquet of joy" metaphor proves particularly instructive. Present joy does not constitute a different meal from eschatological joy but the same feast experienced in anticipation. The appetizer shares the essential nature of the main course while whetting appetite for more. This distinguishes Augustine's pilgrim joy from merely "anticipatory" or "provisional" categories: present joy participates genuinely in eternal reality while pointing beyond itself toward fuller participation. The pilgrim tastes real joy now—not substitute or preliminary joy—but experiences it as forestate rather than fullness.

Similarly, the sabbath framework reveals how temporal practices prepare for eternal realities without creating artificial discontinuity. Sabbath observance in the present does not merely symbolize future rest but actually participates in the eternal sabbath through temporal means. The "tranquil joy born of hope" represents genuine tranquility and genuine joy, not merely in

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463 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 91.15.
464 Stewart-Kroeker, "Wordless Cry of Jubilation," 298.
465 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 62.9.

appearance. This tranquility emerges from and sustains hope precisely because it derives from the same divine source that will provide ultimate rest.

Augustine's integration of grace and gratitude thus resolves the apparent tension between joy as gift and joy as calling. Gratitude represents the appropriate human response to grace, but gratitude itself emerges from grace. "Let believers…be joyfully thankful that they have found at last what they believed in before they saw it…"[466] The practices that cultivate joy do so precisely because they align human action with divine activity. When pilgrims praise God, confess their sins, practice humility, and engage in prayer, they do not manufacture joy but position themselves to receive the joy God continuously offers. The exhortation to joy succeeds not through human effort but through grace-enabled cooperation with divine grace.

This understanding illuminates why Augustine can speak of joy as both entirely God's work and genuinely human response. The joy pilgrims experience and practice represents God's joy shared with creatures through the Spirit's indwelling presence.[467] As members of Christ's body, pilgrims participate in the joy of their head while remaining dependent on that head for their very capacity to rejoice. The calling to cultivate joy thus represents invitation to deeper participation in divine life rather than autonomous human achievement.

Having established the theoretical framework of Augustine's understanding of pilgrim joy as both gift and calling, we now turn to examine how this understanding functions in his concrete pastoral practice. Two sermons on the Psalms—Psalm 123 (124) and Psalm 83 (84)—provide particularly rich examples of Augustine's exhortational approach to joy, demonstrating how he weaves together theological sophistication with pastoral sensitivity to address his congregation's spiritual needs. These sermons reveal Augustine at his most pastoral, neither the abstract theologian nor the polemical controversialist, but the caring bishop who understands both the theoretical foundations and practical demands of Christian joy.

Exposition of Psalm 123 (124): The Communion of Pilgrims

Establishing the Totus Christus Framework

[466] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 129.10.
[467] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 4.8, "You have given joy to my heart."

Augustine's *Exposition of Psalm 123 (124)* places him immediately on familiar theological terrain.[468] As one of the psalms of ascent, Psalm 123 (124) provides Augustine with an opportunity to articulate a theme that appears regularly throughout his homiletical corpus: the movement of pilgrims accomplished not merely through physical locomotion but through "the affections of our hearts."[469] While this motif features prominently in his expositions of the Psalms of Ascent (120-134), it extends far beyond these particular biblical passages to encompass his broader theological vision. Augustine's introduction to this sermon also serves as an occasion to revisit his fundamental emphasis on the *totus Christus*—the unified voice of the Church combined with its head as the singer of this, and indeed every, psalm.[470] The singers of this psalm encompass not only the historical pilgrims journeying toward Jerusalem but also the assembled congregation in Hippo, united by the theological principle that "though many, we are one, for Christ is one, and Christ's members are one with Christ, one in Christ."[471]

Typological Unity and Pilgrim Identity

Having established the question of corporate identity, Augustine proceeds to expound the implications of how the Hippo congregation's voice joins the broader Body of Christ, and consequently how the themes of this psalm—particularly the pilgrim journey to the heavenly Jerusalem—become inextricably bound to the lived experience of those gathered for worship. Like the original singers, and as one with them, Augustine's congregation sings this song while traversing the pilgrim path. Like the ancient travelers first ascending toward the temple in Jerusalem, they sing as those who have nearly arrived yet remain en route. With this typological connection firmly established, Augustine weaves together the voices of his congregation with those of the first pilgrims, creating an interpretive synthesis that collapses temporal distance. Like their ancient counterparts, the singers in Hippo inhabit the existential tension between what belongs to them

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468 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.1. For Augustine's approach to the Psalms of Ascent, see Michael Cameron, *Augustine's Construction of Figurative Exegesis against the Donatists* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996), 234-267.
469 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.1.
470 For Augustine's development of the *totus Christus* concept, see Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "The Double Face of Love in Augustine," *Louvain Studies* 17 (1992): 116-128; Marie-François Berrouard, "L'exégèse augustinienne de *Rm* 7,7-25 entre 396 et 418, avec des remarques sur le 'corpus paulinien' de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 16 (1981): 101-196.
471 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.1.

during the journey and what awaits them upon arrival. Consequently, they sing: "They are in love, and they sing for love, they sing for longing. Sometimes they sing in their troubles and at other times, when they are singing in hope, they sing exultantly."[472]

The Hermeneutics of Longing and Eschatological Hope

The singers—these multiple voices in various circumstances—share one fundamental commonality: they sing from longing. They groan appropriately as those still taking steps and making progress, experiencing the inevitable fatigue of pilgrims not yet at rest in the comfort of home. Unlike Augustine's previous sermon on Psalm 83, however, joy emerges in this exposition almost immediately. Within the broader theological framework of hope, Augustine observes that his congregation sings "in hope," leading him to articulate a crucial distinction: "our joy is not realized yet but is already ours in hope."[473]

For Augustine, hope transcends mere wishful thinking in the present regarding potential future outcomes. Rather, hope finds firm grounding in the past reality of Christ and the demonstrated fulfillment of God's promises. Thus, hope anchors itself in historical accomplishment while maintaining its forward-looking orientation. In the present moment, therefore, hope remains "unshakable" regarding future fulfillment precisely because it rests upon completed divine action. As Augustine explains, "our hope is so unshakable that it is as though the reality were here already, for we cannot be anxious about what the truth itself has promised."[474] The tension between present and future maintains itself through the epistemological category of sight. The Christian believes now but will see in the eschaton. The pilgrim lives in hope only because the full beatific vision remains temporarily deferred, yet that vision's certainty is assured when "we will see God face to face."[475] The underlying assumption of both Paul's Corinthian correspondence and Augustine's sermonic framework presupposes that while the final and complete sight of God is delayed, it is not entirely denied in the present. Seeing through a glass darkly still presumes some measure of current vision. Within this sermon, therefore, Augustine emphasizes elements of the Christian journey that remain

[472] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.2.
[473] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.2.
[474] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.2
[475] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.2; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

accessible presently even though they await full realization at the consummation of all things. Joy represents one such element of continuity, as demonstrated throughout his theological corpus.

Pilgrimage as the Hermeneutical Key

The interpretive key for understanding this dynamic—and consequently for comprehending Christian joy—lies in conceiving the Christian life as pilgrimage. Only those who recognize themselves as being en route gain present access to the joy that awaits them. The crucial element is traveling toward a destination whose arrival is certain. "Anyone who is still on pilgrimage, walking by faith, has not yet reached home but is already on the way to it," Augustine declares.[476] Here the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" receives explicit articulation—the Christian exists as a pilgrim who has not yet reached home but is already journeying toward it. For Augustine, this description functions not merely as ontological description but as prescriptive guidance for Christian living. The life of pilgrimage encompasses both exclamation and exhortation. Augustine simultaneously affirms his listeners' position on the path while instructing them in proper modes of travel: "Let us walk, then, like people who know they are on the way, because the king of our homeland has made himself our way."[477]

Embedded within this very framework lies Augustine's emphasis on the continuity available to Christians, for "the king of our homeland has made himself our way." Christians journey not in vague hope, wondering whether they will arrive, but on the way by the one who has made himself their way. The exhortation calls for persistent forward movement—putting one foot in front of the other—while walking in a manner worthy of their calling as pilgrims.

Christ as Destination and Path

God's promises remain secure because the intersection of the "now" and the "not yet" is found in Christ. "To what are we traveling? To the truth. How shall we get there? Through faith. Whither are we traveling? To Christ. How shall we reach him? Through Christ."[478] Christ functions

[476] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.3.
[477] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.3.
[478] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.4.

simultaneously as both the destination toward which the pilgrim travels and the means by which she arrives there.

Along Christ's path, Christ's joy becomes accessible to the traveler because they unite their voice with the "jubilant singers" of Psalm 123, "whose joy springs from hope."[479] Only individuals who inhabit this eschatological hope, available to them presently, can access an eschatological joy equally available in the present. Here Augustine not only perceives the promise of joy but exhorts his congregation to live in and from it: "Let this hope be unhesitating in us, and let us sing for joy."[480] One means of taking those faithful steps—both in the heart and on life's journey—is through the psalms generally and Psalm 123 particularly.

Scripture as Mirror and Song

Augustine's exhortation to joy includes an exhortation to sing the psalms. In Psalm 123, the pilgrim both joins their voice to the earthly chorus of pilgrims and has their longing properly directed toward its ultimate end. Augustine encourages his congregation to recognize their own voice in the psalmist's words: "Listen to it as though you were hearing yourselves. Listen as though you were looking at your own reflection in the mirror of the scriptures."[481] Scripture functions as the mirror in which pilgrims observe their own story, while the psalms serve as the songs pilgrims sing along the way. When singing the psalms of ascent generally and Psalm 123 (124) particularly, Augustine exhorts his congregation toward the joy that belongs to them in Christ, for "when you gaze into the scriptural mirror your own cheerful face looks back at you."[482]

The Mystical Body and Temporal Transcendence

The convergence point of "now" and "not yet" extends beyond Christ alone—or at least, not merely to the incarnate Son. It is also discovered in the body of Christ that exists simultaneously in heaven and on earth. Augustine again points to the surprising continuity of hope and joy available to pilgrims through their connection with those who have preceded them. "The holy martyrs have

[479] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.4.
[480] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.4.
[481] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.5.
[482] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.5.

sung" this song of Psalm 123 (124) before, he informs the gathering. They are the birds who have escaped the fowler's snare, for "as long as we are on our pilgrimage in this world, we have not escaped yet. But some members of this body to which we also belong have gone on ahead of us, and they can truly sing of their escape."[483]

The martyrs have not escaped from death but through it. Their escape transcends movement from material to immaterial realms, representing instead liberation from the longing and sorrow of this present age to the inauguration of praise and fullness of joy in the age to come. Similar to those who fled Sodom—a theme from Psalm 83—Augustine relates the present pilgrim condition to partial captivity. Some members of the body who have preceded them, especially those who died for and in the faith, have escaped, while other members remain in captivity. Thus, the one body of Christ embodies both the "now" and the "not yet," yet the one Christ sings this song together. Indeed, through the psalm's singing, their voices unite and are heard in unison, thereby transcending the distance between the two states.

Communal Joy and Eschatological Participation

Similarly, the joy of those who have escaped becomes, in a critically important sense, available to those who remain in captivity precisely because they too will arrive where the others have gone. The exhortation to joy emerges once more, encompassing both singing and rejoicing: "Let us all sing the psalm together" and "exult as though we were in their company."[484] Praise and joy link together in the rejoicing body of Christ, for praise, like joy, will endure into eternity. Borrowing imagery from Roman triumphal processions, Augustine exhorts his congregation to prayer and praise in joy as those whose victory is assured, for Christ's victory becomes their own.

> The people who sang that were not yet there, but they were on the way, and so great was their joy as they hastened onward, so strong their hope of arriving, that even while still struggling along the road they felt as though they were already safe at home. The same conviction should be in us. Let us see ourselves included in the triumph to be celebrated in the world to come, when we shall taunt death, defeated now and swallowed up in victory.[485]

These lines simultaneously offer encouragement and exhortation. They receive the encouragement of "strong hope of arriving" while being enjoined to maintain the conviction that

[483] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.6.
[484] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.7.
[485] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.7.

"the same conviction should be in us." The exhortation encompasses both singing the psalm and doing so as participants in the larger body of Christ—including both those who sang it previously in history and those who have preceded them into glory. Augustine charges his congregation with both a perspectival transformation and a practical reorientation. They must "see ourselves included in the triumph" and live in a manner consistent with that victory. Joy links both temporal states. Joy will be discovered in the future, for "we shall be united with the angels and rejoice with our king," and remains accessible presently because "we are there already in hope and in our hearts, so let us rejoice with him" in the present.[486]

Discerning True Joy from False Joy

Augustine's exhortation to joy comes laden with warnings regarding proper discernment. He guides his congregation through the psalm while cautioning them to recognize differing types of joy and to set their hearts on the joy that will endure. In an extended section, Augustine observes that "visible joys" may lure pilgrims through their proximity and immediate apprehensibility, but they must not be confused with "realities they could not yet see."[487] The caution here involves avoiding infatuation with this life, seduced by the sweetness presently available, when what they require is to "set their love on what God has promised."[488] This necessitates a reorientation of both perspective and desire—to love what God has promised and then live worthily to attain it. Once again, the link connecting promise and fulfillment, as well as orientation and perspective, is joy: "You who are rejoicing and singing now, you who possess everlasting life with no fear of ever losing it..."[489]

To rejoice and sing in joy means recognizing the possession of everlasting life and the promise that upon arrival in the *civitas Dei*, with Christ himself as their path, the joy offered and the everlasting life granted will never be removed. They must walk and sing as those *en route*, rejoicing as those already liberated, voices joined with the martyrs who precede them in freedom. They walk, they sing, they rejoice in Christ, the one whose victory they share, for "it is quite plain that you yourself are not the victor—only he is, who dwells in you."[490]

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[486] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.7.
[487] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.8.
[488] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.8.
[489] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.8.
[490] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.9.

The Indwelling Victor and Shared Triumph

Once again, where modern interpretation might perceive discontinuity, Augustine emphasizes continuity. Even here, with a reminder that Christians are not themselves the victors in the battle against evil, sin, and death, Augustine reminds his congregation that they share in the victory as though they had accomplished it themselves, for the Victor dwells within them and they are united to him. The exhortation accompanies the promise, for they walk amid life's trials and temptations destined for both struggle and splendor. To emphasize the promise, he asks, "Can you carry such a commander in you and be defeated?"[491] To emphasize the exhortation, he insists, "why did he so defeat him, if not to teach you how to do battle with the devil?"[492] Amid the conflict, pilgrims are both already joyful because Christ has overcome and also "should exult and rejoice in Christ and look to receive their substance."[493]

Challenging False Securities

To further illustrate the tension inherent in the pilgrim condition, Augustine references a saying apparently familiar to his congregation: "Better in hand than in hope."[494] As he approaches the sermon's conclusion, Augustine carefully redirects attention to the strength of hope mentioned at the outset, lest his congregation be tempted to denigrate hope itself. The common saying suggests that present possession surpasses potential acquisition, typically referring to money actually held versus fortune that might come. Augustine, rather than immediately pivoting to a spiritual interpretation of the saying, critiques the saying even within its original monetary context. He embarks on an extended reflection about grasping gold while recognizing that in life, the stronger dominate the weak, so someone might forcibly remove it from one's hands. No grip proves sufficiently secure if someone stronger appears. Instead, he asks, "If your grip is not secure, why not hold on instead to what you cannot lose?"[495]

The implication for pilgrim life returns to Augustine's consistent theme: hold fast to that which is good and hold loosely that which easily ensnares. The "visible joys" mentioned earlier in

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491 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.9.
492 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.9.
493 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.9.
494 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.10.
495 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.10.

the sermon receive concrete illustration through the example of gold, but pilgrims journey toward a city with streets paved with gold—why settle for pennies on the path when riches await arrival? Instead, they receive exhortation to grasp what cannot be lost and worry less about what can easily be taken from them.

In conclusion, Augustine returns to the thread he has woven throughout the exposition—joy as both divine gift and human responsibility. Like the sparrow in Psalm 83, Augustine notes the deliverance of the bird in Psalm 123 (124): "Let them shout for joy at their deliverance, let them fly to God and triumph in God over their rescue, because the Lord was in them and saved them from being captured in the snare."[496] Here again, joy emerges as both gracious gift from God in Christ and commanded response to that grace. Similarly, at the sermon's end, in one final exhortation to his congregation, Augustine concludes, "The important thing is to avoid getting stuck in this life so that, when at last the trap is broken apart, you may shout joyfully..."[497]

Sermon on Psalm 83 (84): Joy in the Wine Press

Augustine's sermon on Psalm 83 (84) constitutes a key text for understanding how he conceived joy and exhorted his congregation to joy. Taking his cue from the psalm's superscription, Augustine begins his sermon with lengthy exposition of the inscription itself. He establishes the context of the psalm by noting that the title concerns the "wine presses," which Augustine interprets as the Church.[498] The title, however, accomplishes more than contextualizing the psalm and sermon; Augustine perceives in it the context of this present age. The Church exists in this age as the wine press of sorrow—pressed down, trampled, squeezed—but being stored up for something greater beyond.

The Context of Pilgrimage: Longing and Satisfaction

This framework enables Augustine to introduce a major sermonic theme: longing and satisfaction. The restless heart cannot help but long for rest, as a grape cannot help but long for trampling to end, fermentation to complete, and wine to be ready. Longing represents, in some sense, the natural

496 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.11.
497 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 123.11.
498 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.1.

state of the human heart. Yet it exceeds mere natural inclination; it constitutes a posture to be cultivated. Augustine writes: "Train yourself until you have a capacity for God; long and long for what you will possess forever."[499]

Before fully launching into the exposition of the psalm, however, Augustine considers a further lesson from Israel's life. "Among the Israelites those who were in too much of a hurry were condemned. Indeed, the attitude of people in a hurry is repeatedly censured in scripture. Who are they? They are people who have turned to God, but on not finding here the rest they were seeking, or the joys they were constantly being promised, grow weary on the way."[500] Augustine has not yet directly mentioned the Christian life as pilgrimage metaphor, but it remains clearly in view from the beginning as those who "grow weary on the way." The wine press, then, represents both the journey's context and the journey's arduous sense itself.

Similarly, Augustine invokes Lot's wife as a warning of one who made a significant misstep on the journey. "We have been freed from the Sodom of our past lives, so let us not look behind us; for this is what being in a hurry means—paying no heed to what God has promised, because it is a long way off, and looking back at what is very close, from which you have just been delivered."[501] We observe, then, this tension of present trouble and future glory within the pilgrimage context itself. Longing precludes a sense and perhaps even desire to hurry, but Christian pilgrimage requires avoiding hurry because it likely causes stumbling. Augustine establishes his sermonic stage for exhortation to both know one's journey location and the virtuous travel manner.

Maintaining the Tension: Desire Sent Ahead

The key involves maintaining tension between how things are and what God has promised they will become. Rushing ahead risks hurry, but one must still cultivate longing for the heavenly future. To avoid paralysis in this liminal state, the way forward, Augustine declares, is to "send our desire ahead of us."[502] We are those in the wine press during this life, but we know not only what we are (grapes in the press) but what we shall become (wine stored in vats). To maintain forward movement, one is drawn by hope for what lies ahead. Desire for what will be motivates during what currently is.

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[499] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.2.
[500] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.3.
[501] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.3.
[502] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.4.

As if illustrating to his congregation the danger of rushing too far ahead, Augustine at this point emphasizes the negative side of the tension surrounding the discontinuity between this life and the next. As grape aspires to wine but is not yet there, so "Here we desire, there we receive; here we sigh with longing, there we rejoice; here we pray, there praise; here we groan, there exult."[503] The wine press process cannot be avoided, it can only be endured. While Christians endure the pressing of this life while waiting for the Vintner to complete the vinification, the longing that exists as bridge between the two must be fostered, cultivated, and fertilized along the way.

The Crucial Continuity: Joy

But Augustine pauses his conversation about the present life's discontinuities with the next to interject a crucial continuity: joy. Augustine acknowledges that the singer of Psalm 83 (84) is mostly filled with sadness as evidenced in lines such as, "My soul faints with longing for the courts of the Lord," yet "clearly he does not possess what he longs for; but he is not therefore denied joy, is he?"[504] Augustine answers his rhetorical question by quoting Apostle Paul in Romans 12, for hope's joy remains accessible to Christians even now while awaiting final joy in the life to come.

Commenting on heart and flesh leaping for joy from Psalm 83 (84):4, Augustine writes: "They leap for joy here, towards that other place."[505] On the pilgrim journey, Augustine has already urged the congregation not to hurry and not to look back but to press forward, all while using this psalm's words to "send our desires ahead of us." Now, the urge involves allowing your heart and flesh to "leap for joy here," in this present life, yet "toward that other place," the future heavenly reality. The bridge between the two is joy.

Joy from the future comes rushing back into the present to both console pilgrims on their journey and cajole them forward. Christians are to take joyful steps here toward that final joy there. Augustine's sermonic progression points out that hope causes the leap here in both heart and flesh, which constitutes a leap toward God as joy's final end. Using the psalm's sparrow imagery, Augustine notes that the sparrow plies its wings with faith, hope, and love to fly to its ultimate destination and final home.

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503 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.5.
504 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.6.
505 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.8.

Anticipation as Present Posture

Augustine then becomes more explicit in the sermon, drawing imagery and metaphors more directly into his listeners' minds. They, like the psalmist (or, better expressed, they as the psalmist in the one voice of Christ and his Church), are "here in body," yet "far ahead in thought."[506] The key framework Augustine employs throughout the sermon and finally names here in the middle is *anticipation*. We "ponder future joys" and are "far ahead in thought" in anticipation of what is to come, yet anticipation occurs in the present. Anticipation represents the posture of one "meditating already on what he will be doing when he reaches" the promised final joys. One meditates on ultimate joy in the present wine press to receive penultimate joys bound for future glory. It is the "prospect of joy in that place"[507] that not only illuminates and inspires travelers moving toward to that final place but provides joy in the present.

Christians must pass through the "valley of weeping" on the way to "a place of joy,"[508] but the way is not without joy itself. The "spring of our joy"[509] represents the final beatific vision of God himself, but this eternal spring nonetheless constitutes a font that nourishes pilgrims in their temporal state. Joy and sorrow mingle in this present life, but only joy will remain hereafter. Joy, in hope and anticipation, represents one bridge crossing the boundary between the now and not yet.

Cultivating Joy Through Worship

Like longing, this joy must be cultivated—nourished such that it provides nourishment along the way. Throughout the sermon, Augustine weaves the notion of joy as both gift to be received and calling to be cultivated. Joy, then, is not descriptive of Christians' present state of affairs, for that could not be so given the "valley of weeping" and life's "wine press," but is prescriptive for life passing through that valley and within that press. Christians both receive joy and pursue it. As Augustine put it,

> Our emotions are movements of our spirits. Joy is an expansion of the spirit; sadness is a contraction of the spirit; covetousness is the spirit's movement towards something; fear is the spirit's flight from something. For you are expansive in spirit when you rejoice; you are

506 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.9.
507 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.10.
508 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.11.
509 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.11.

> narrowed in spirit when you are troubled; you move forward in spirit when you are drawn to something; you flee in spirit when you are fearful.[510]

One critical way to pursue joy involves rejoicing through worship. Christians are to pray for eyes of faith to see "those future joys"[511] and allow them to call forth praise. The alleluia of eternity is, like joy, available in the present. "This will be the work that occupies us totally, an 'Alleluia' that never fades away."[512] The worshipper remains keenly attuned to the continuity and discontinuity within the Christian life, for while we praise now, our desire and determination both flag. Augustine uses the present state of his own congregation to illustrate Christian life writ large. They may be growing tired, standing in the cathedral, their "needs distract you from the joy" of worship, but one day they will be able to praise without staggering. They may tire in the present both physically and mentally, but one day their stamina and their alleluia will be unending. Praise, like joy, participates in Christian pilgrimage both now and upon arrival in the city of God. Joy gives life to praise both here and hereafter.

Conclusion: Augustine as Theologian of Joy

Augustine has earned a well-established reputation as the theologian of sin, and numerous scholarly treatments of original sin have cemented this interpretive legacy.[513] This characterization, however, represents an unfortunately truncated understanding of his theological corpus, for it is equally appropriate to speak of Augustine as a theologian of joy. Far from embodying the morose theologian preoccupied with human suffering, when we expand the scope of inquiry to include his theology as articulated in his sermonic corpus, a significantly more nuanced image of Augustine emerges—one that encompasses both sorrow and joy within a unified theological vision.[514] A sustained examination of his homiletical works demonstrates that for Augustine, the Christian

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[510] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), Homily 46.8.
[511] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.12.
[512] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 83.12.
[513] See, for example, Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on the Fundamental Dilemma of Human Existence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 148-166; Jesse Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[514] For Augustine's sermonic theology as a distinct corpus, see Edmund Hill, "Introduction," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part III, vol. 1, *Sermons 1-19* (New York: New City Press, 1990), 13-37.

experience never consists entirely of either sorrow or joy but rather encompasses both simultaneously. This life, he acknowledges, involves genuine groaning, yet it remains "a kind of groaning that also has room for joy."[515]

The Pilgrim Framework and Eschatological Joy

The interpretive framework Augustine employs for understanding joy remains consistent with and finds its most coherent expression within his larger theological motif of the Christian life as pilgrimage to the heavenly city.[516] Joy becomes available to the pilgrim precisely *qua* pilgrim. Within this conceptual framework, a joy that transcends temporal and spatial limitations—accessible to the pilgrim presently while awaiting eschatological fulfillment—achieves its greatest theological coherence. Augustine articulates this dynamic clearly: "But what is the source of our joy now? Surely even now it is in him, or at least in hoping for him? We are given joy now, certainly, but it is a joy in hope; one day we shall be joyful in him. Even now he is our joy, though still in hope; then we shall enjoy him face to face."[517]

If, as Augustine consistently maintains, the source of the pilgrim's joy is God himself, then through union with Christ the pilgrim necessarily possesses access to authentic joy in the present, even though its complete fulfillment remains eschatologically deferred. While most contemporary scholars emphasize the discontinuity between earthly joy and heavenly joy, this study has demonstrated that such emphasis tends to distort the comprehensive picture of joy presented in Augustine's sermonic theology.[518] For not only does union with Christ constitute part of the pilgrim's present joy, Augustine's consistent exhortation to joy would prove nonsensical if joy were not genuinely available in the present moment. Consequently, when we adjust our interpretive lens to examine Augustine's exhortations to joy, a fuller theological image emerges.

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[515] Augustine, *Sermon 255*, 6. Translation from WSA III/7, 139.
[516] For comprehensive treatments of Augustine's pilgrimage motif, see Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Jean-Claude Fredouille, "Le thème du pèlerinage dans la prédication de saint Augustin," in *Pèlerinages et croisades*, ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995), 97-114.
[517] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 62.16.
[518] Cf. the contrasting approach in Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), who emphasizes discontinuity; versus the more integrated reading in Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

True Joy versus False Joy: A Fundamental Distinction

Within his exhortations, Augustine frequently presents a juxtaposition that concerns not merely the temporal distinction between present life and the eschaton, but rather the qualitative distinction between true joy and false joy. A particularly illuminating example appears in his sermon on Psalm 84, which merits extensive quotation:

> O God, in converting us you will give us life, and your people will rejoice in you. Over its misdeeds it will rejoice in itself, but over its good, in you; for when it tried to enjoy itself, it found only matter for mourning in itself, but now, since God is our whole joy, anyone who wants to rejoice without any worry at all should seek joy in him who cannot perish. Why look for joy in money, my brothers and sisters? Either the money fades away or you do, and no one knows which will fail first. The only certain thing is that both will perish, but which one first is uncertain. No human being can stay here for ever, but money cannot either; and the same applies to your gold, clothing, house, property, large estates, and finally this light of day itself. Make no attempt, then, to find your joy in these things, but rejoice in that light which knows no setting, rejoice in that light which is neither ushered in by yesterday nor followed by tomorrow. And what light is that? *I am the light of the world*, he says (Jn 8:12). He who assures you, *I am the light of the world*, calls you to himself. As he calls you, he converts you; as he converts you, he heals you; when he has healed you, you will see him who converted you; and he it is to whom the psalm says, *Your people will rejoice in you*.[519]

When we observe Augustine exhorting his congregation to examine their joys critically and discern their authentic sources, his pastoral strategy becomes evident: he does not defer true joy until the eschaton but rather encourages his listeners to identify the source of their present joy. If that source is God, then it constitutes true joy, even though such joy continues to groan due to the absence of final felicity.

The In Spe, In Re Dynamic Reconsidered

Similarly, Augustine's characteristic and frequently employed juxtaposition of *in spe* and *in re*, when applied specifically to joy, does not concern partial, preliminary, or merely anticipatory joy.[520] Rather, it describes pilgrim joy—authentic joy experienced in this life precisely because its source originates from the next. This represents joy that God preserves and will consummate for those who fear him and faithfully traverse the pilgrim journey. Joy, purchased in the past through Christ's redemptive

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519 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 84.8.

520 For Augustine's *in spe/in re* terminology, see Basil Studer, "Sacramentum et exemplum chez saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975): 87-141.

work, is stored in the future for the pilgrim who will arrive at the celestial city, and is simultaneously given as a *depositum* for the remainder of the earthly sojourn.[521]

This joy functions as both divine gift and human calling, both grace to be received and virtue to be pursued, precisely because it participates simultaneously in temporal and eternal realities. Consequently, the Christian must "rejoice always," even amid sorrow, for sorrow proves temporary while joy endures eternally.[522] The means of rejoicing always, Augustine maintains, is to embrace the pilgrim identity. "We find joy both here and in the world to come. Yes, I mean it: both here and in the world to come; for what have we to make us joyful here? Our hope. And there? The reality. Anyone who rejoices in hope has intense joy. And if we rejoice in hope, look at the consequence to which the apostle points: we are patient in anguish."[523]

In his correspondence with Macedonius, Augustine articulates themes present throughout his homiletical corpus that, had Macedonius heard these sermons, might have obviated his need for epistolary inquiry.[524] In *Letter 155*, Augustine encourages Macedonius to live this life with explicit reference to the next—to labor presently with the eschatological goal in mind, and thus to be formed in this life by the reality of the next.[525] The proper and fitting existence constitutes a pilgrim life that experiences joy in the temporal realm precisely because it participates authentically in the eternal realm presently. Pilgrim joy sustains the traveler through encouragement in hope and preservation in grace, enabling continued faithful progress along the path toward the final joy that awaits.

This theological integration of present joy and eschatological fulfillment reveals Augustine not as a dour pessimist fixated on human depravity, but as a profound pastor-theologian who understood that authentic Christian joy—rooted in union with Christ and sustained by hope in God's promises—provides both the foundation and the motivation for faithful Christian living. His sermons demonstrate that joy, properly understood within the pilgrim framework, offers believers both present consolation and future expectation, making the arduous journey toward the *civitas Dei* not merely endurable but genuinely joyful. When viewed through the lens of Augustine's consistent

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521 Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14 for Paul's use of *arrabo/pignus* terminology that Augustine frequently employs.
522 Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:16; Philippians 4:4.
523 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 146.2; Cf. Romans 5:3-4.
524 For the historical context of Augustine's correspondence with Macedonius, see Johannes Divjak, "Augustin et Macédonius: aux origines de l'augustinisme politique," in *Les lettres de saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak*, ed. Claude Lepelley (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1983), 235-262.
525 Augustine, *Letter* 155.4.13-14.

homiletical practice, joy emerges not as theological afterthought but as central to his understanding of how souls are moved forward along the pilgrim path toward their ultimate destination in God.

Conclusion:
Preaching for the Dangerous Pilgrimage

Don't stray off the road, don't go back, don't stay where you are.
Sing and keep on walking.
– *Augustine, Sermon 256*

Similar to sermon 346C, discussed earlier in this study, Augustine's sermon 80 on Luke 17 develops parallel themes concerning faithful living amid crisis and uncertainty. In the Lucan narrative, Jesus heals a boy possessed with a demon that his disciples had been unable to help. When the disciples ask Jesus why they were incapable of helping the boy, Jesus tells them their inability was the result of their "lack of faith."[526] Augustine begins his sermon noting that while Jesus did rebuke his disciples for their lack of faith, he did so to nurture that faith. As Augustine put it, "the mercy of the Lord was not denied them for their lack of faith; instead he rebuked them, nursed them along, perfected them, decorated them."[527] These lines illustrate the aim of that sermon, Augustine's preaching writ large, and his sermons' continued importance for the contemporary church. His sermon on the text mimics what he describes Jesus doing in the text: nursing along the faith of those listening, moving them forward on the voyage to and in Christ. This is precisely why these pre-modern sermons remain a rich source for a post-secular culture.

Later in the sermon Augustine revisits a theme from sermon 346C when he says, "The times are evil, the times are troubled, that's what people say. Let us live good lives, and the times are good. We ourselves are the times. Whatever we are like, that's what the times are like."[528] Augustine will conclude the sermon with a line illustrative of the whole of his preaching for a pilgrim church, "Do what he has told you, and hope for what he has promised."[529] This final line, containing both a command and a promise, encapsulates the goal of each sermon from Augustine.

As we have seen, each Augustinian sermon is designed to move souls, thus the preaching of Augustine remains a source of both comfort and courage for the contemporary pilgrim church to nurse it along its own pilgrim path. For those living in their own troubled and turbulent times, these ancient sermons continue to form a pilgrim people to do what Christ has told them, and hope for

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[526] *The New International Version*. Zondervan, 2011, p. Mt 17:20.
[527] Augustine, *Sermon* 80.1
[528] Augustine, *Sermon* 80.
[529] Augustine, *Sermon* 80.

what he has promised. In reading these sermons, contemporary Christians are thus formed, but also, are able and encouraged to incorporate and contextualize the thrust of Augustine's preaching, even as it comes to us from a vastly different context. Thus, to conclude this study, we will examine the significance of Augustine's preaching for a contemporary pilgrim church and its implications in the key areas of preaching, formation, and ministry. If we ourselves are the times, as Augustine reminds us, we inhabit the pilgrim church from within our own traditions. I discuss the contemporary significance of Augustine's preaching without getting into detailed discussions of other approaches. The footnotes to this conclusion serve especially to highlight those discussions though without sustained engagement. I write from and work within the Dutch Reformed tradition and have skin in the game, as it were, as an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. My own ecclesial location and participation in the broader neo-Calvinist tradition may serve illustrative for the analysis below. This analysis will incorporate selective engagement with contemporary scholarship in these areas to illuminate Augustine's distinctive theological contributions and their relevance to current discourse.

Preaching

Identity Formation vs. Information Transfer

Augustine's understanding of preaching as the training of souls for and along the pilgrim journey challenges a contemporary tendency to reduce sermons to information delivery systems.[530] His emphasis on forming pilgrim consciousness suggests that effective preaching must help congregations understand not just *what* Christians believe, but *who* they are as people on a journey. This has a particular relevance in our age of information overload, where access to religious content is abundant but formation in Christian identity often remains superficial.[531]

Similarly, Augustine's Christological focus, seen especially in his sermonic emphasis on the *totus Christus,* invites contemporary preachers to ensure their preaching is properly Christocentric. Each sermon is to be viewed, as Augustine viewed each psalm, through the lens of the person and work of Christ. In short, each sermon is to be properly proclamatory in nature. The proper focus of

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[530] For a systematic approach to many contemporary preaching practices, especially as they relate to Augustine's homiletical approach, see Ronald Boyd-MacMillan,"The Transforming Sermon." PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2009.

[531] See, for example, James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood.* Pantheon Books, 2011.

a pilgrim sermon is on what God has done in Christ and the Christian response, as opposed to being primarily about what we are to do. Preaching that merely informs or conveys practical assistance or seeks to elicit emotional response, misses a properly pilgrim sermonic emphasis on the work of Christ and the grace of God.[532]

Preaching that moves listeners along the pilgrim path is thus preaching that moves beyond merely explaining biblical texts, to help people locate themselves within the biblical narrative as pilgrims traveling toward God. It remains, in the words of Lindbeck, "likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant."[533] Furthermore, preaching to and for pilgrims understands Scripture not merely as a manual for living, but as formative literature that shapes identity. Whatever the genre of Scripture exposited in a sermon, Augustine's pilgrim preaching illustrates that each sermon is an opportunity to locate those texts within the larger narrative of God's redemptive purposes. As such, biblical sermons, even where they seek to teach, are aimed at spiritual formation rather than mere academic exercises.

The Integration of Teaching, Delighting, and Moving

Augustine's threefold rhetorical strategy (*docere*, *delectare*, *movere*) offers a sophisticated model for engaging diverse learning styles and attention spans in contemporary contexts. His recognition that most people need more than plain instruction—they need "spices" to make truth palatable—speaks directly to our media-saturated culture where compelling communication is essential for sustained attention.[534] This suggests contemporary preaching should *teach* with clarity and precision, *delight* through creative engagement and beauty, and *move* toward transformation. More specifically, when viewed through the lens of pilgrimage, contemporary preaching could learn from Augustine to teach

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[532] Boyd-MacMillan, for example, illustrates specific problems with a variety of contemporary homiletical approaches and how they might be corrected and instructed by familiarity with Augustine's sermonic corpus and homiletical practices. While Boyd-MacMillan helpfully highlights methodological concerns as well as technique, my own concern is more broadly theological.

[533] The full context from Lindbeck is about larger commitments of religious communities, but it works just as well in relation to preaching. "Religious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant, but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life." Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 114.

[534] For media saturation and what the Internet is doing to both cognition and the ability to think and listen, see Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

a perspective of pilgrimage, delight through rhetorical and creative re-narration of the lives of listeners, and seek to move them further along the pilgrim path to and in Christ.[535]

Augustine utilized the pilgrimage motif not as one superimposed but as one extrapolated from the biblical narrative itself. As such, contemporary preaching could learn from Augustine that its primary focus is not moralistic instruction, nor inspirational therapeutic jargon, but biblical exegesis. The preacher is, with Augustine, a tutor in the school of Christ.[536] Such a tutor is indeed tasked with teaching, and the contemporary preacher would do well to follow Augustine's lead in teaching the text. Still, Augustine himself was not a pure expository preacher in the way that is often understood in contemporary homiletics. Rather, his approach to teaching the text was more of a hybrid. Neither topical nor expository, Augustine's homiletical approach was fluid. The teaching he did, particularly on pilgrimage, was often derived from passages and narratives not directly related to the theme. In his typological approach to the Bible, Augustine demonstrates how to read Scripture and preach through a figural lens.

Similarly, while Augustine is often considered to have eschewed the formalities of rhetoric for a more rustic style in his preaching, rhetorical flourishes are to be found throughout. Whether he is meditating on the sacraments spilling from the side of Christ on the cross,[537] the pattern of Mary as the woman who says "yes" to God, thus undoing the "yes" of Eve to the serpent,[538] or the consistent imagery of the wood of the cross as that which crosses the wild sea of this present life,[539] the beauty and creativity of Augustine's preaching is never far from view. The contemporary preacher then, could learn to emphasize beauty in their craft, and to see creativity as unrelated to both novelty and juvenility, but as extrapolated from the beauty of the Gospel and the beauty of the

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535 On preaching as narration, see James K.A. Smith, Cultural Liturgies trilogy: *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009), *Imagining the Kingdom* (2013), and *Awaiting the King* (2017), Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

536 In his sermon on Psalm 126 (127), Augustine utilizes both shepherd and teacher imagery for everyone present: the congregation, priests and bishops, and Christ. "We act as your shepherds, but along with you we are sheep under the one shepherd. We stand in this elevated position as your instructors, but we are your fellow-students in this school under our one teacher."

537 "His side, struck by a lance, poured out blood and water on the ground - without a shadow of a doubt these are the sacraments by which the Church is formed." *Sermon* 218.14

538 In *Sermon* 72A, Augustine notes "In the same way as Eve was corrupted by the serpent's talk, so must the Church remain a virgin by the gift of the Almighty. And so, just as Mary gave birth in her womb as a virgin to Christ, so let the members of Christ give birth in their minds, and in this way you will be the mothers of Christ."

539 In *Sermon* 75: "So it's essential we should stay in the boat, that is, that we should be carried on the wood, to be enabled to cross this sea. Now this wood, on which our feebleness is carried, is the Lord's cross, with which we are stamped and reclaimed from submersion in this world. We suffer from seasickness, but the one who will come to our aid is God."

Creator.[540] Calvin Seerveld, in Rainbows for a Fallen World, prefers "imaginative" and "playful" over "creative" when it comes to a Christian aesthetic sensibility. For Seerveld, such a sensibility is rooted in the doctrine of creation and the Christian response to the orderliness and playfulness of creation itself. An imaginative response to preaching then, is neither interested in novelty for its own sake, nor in playfulness as something juvenile. Rather, for Seerveld, the imaginative is serious work and the calling of each Christian. It is no leap, then, to suggest, with Seerveld and Augustine, that preaching ought to be beautiful, serious, and mature all at the same time. Following Augustine, then, preaching on that which is beautiful must itself be beautiful.

While the technique of rhetoric is important, contemporary preachers would do well to mirror Augustine's ultimate aim: to move souls. Rather than emotional reaction for its own sake, or risking manipulation and coercion, Augustine aimed at the movement and transformation of souls. The key for Augustine was not a one-time decision or a bowl of tears, but *progress*. Contemporary pilgrim preaching thus seeks to move each soul one step closer to and along the path of Christ, while recognizing that each soul is in its own unique location on the spiritual journey. What is progress for one may be regression for another, thus truly pilgrim preaching is contextual in its aim to move souls, broad enough to preach to a variety, yet specific enough to be direct. One thinks of Augustine's sermon on Psalm 85 and the sensitivity he displays both in the challenges of prayer for the average Christian, as well as the direct examples of prayer within that sermon. As we saw, in his sermon on a psalm about prayer, Augustine both taught on prayer, illustrated prayer, and encouraged the psalms as the prayer book of the Church. Augustine prays with them, as them, and for them. As Augustine noted in *On Christian Doctrine*, any rhetorical flourishes of the sermon are not for their own sake, yet neither does he capitulate to a utilitarian or pragmatic approach. Quite the contrary, Augustine's approach to pilgrim preaching is deliberate, careful, and thoughtful. The aim of all, however, is the movement of souls in their ascent to the heavenly city.

Eschatological Orientation

Augustine's pilgrim framework provides a compelling alternative to both escapist otherworldliness and secular immanence. His vision of Christians as *viators* offers a way to engage temporal concerns while maintaining ultimate orientation toward God. This is particularly relevant for contemporary

[540] Calvin G. Seerveld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1980)

discussions about Christian public engagement.[541] Christian preaching then, need neither avoid the political, nor remain captive to it, but rather locate the politics of the temporal within the eternal kingdom of God. The question of a sermon need not be whether it is political, but how. Instead of shying away from politics in a "just preach the gospel" approach, Augustine's sermonic corpus illustrates that proclamation of the gospel is inherently political.

Augustine's approach suggests that proper Christian involvement in social, political, and cultural issues flows from a pilgrim identity—neither withdrawing from the world nor becoming captive to its ultimate concerns. As Michael Lamb consistently points out regarding Augustine's thought and practice of preaching, each homily is an "exercise of hope."[542] Politics is to be ordered within a larger framework of love and desire, with preaching encouraging Christian reflection on the larger world. Far from withdrawing or ignoring the world, Christian preaching should engage the world critically from an other-worldly perspective. Within a pilgrim ecclesiology, the church can offer prophetic witness as "citizens of Jerusalem," while remaining citizens of their earthly polities.[543] In just this way, the pilgrim church as citizens of the heavenly city can offer an alternative vision to Babylon's false promises of permanence and peace.

As with the practice of preaching, so Augustine's "other-worldly" orientation paradoxically enables meaningful temporal engagement within and outside of the church. One thinks of the neo-Calvinist perspective of the church as institution and as organism—or, the church gathered and dispersed.[544] To engage with secular society as the pilgrim church is to maintain a prophetic distance such that it can utter a prophetic witness. The church maintains critical perspective on all earthly political projects, while encouraging a hopeful yet ambivalent participation. Pilgrim identity allows for engagement in society to flow from secure identity rather than desperate relevance-seeking or people-pleasing. Similarly, a pilgrim church can afford a temporally long-term perspective, guided by

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[541] A review of the renewed interest in Augustinian political theology is outside the scope of this study. See, for example, Herbert A Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. Columbia University Press, 1963; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Basil Blackwell, 1990; Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge University Press, 1996; and Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

[542] Lamb, *Commonwealth*, 126.

[543] See especially, Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 24-38.

[544] On neo-Calvinism, see Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008; Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005; Craig G. Bartholomew, ed., *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

its future, not merely its present. Such a perspective enables not only patience, but also prudence and temperance. Policy and cultural engagements that are guided by eternal rather than merely temporal timelines are willing to play the long game, while not shying away from the need to compromise in the present.[545]

Similarly, preaching to pilgrims should diagnose and dismantle the loves and desires contemporary Christians hold that conflict with those more consistent with a kingdom ethic.[546] Preaching for pilgrims encourages Christians to be circumspect and wise, thus avoiding the poles of pride and despair. For, as Augustine put it, "These are two things, you see, that kill souls, either despair or wrongheaded hope." In sermon 87 Augustine continues, "the right sort of hope, sets free, so wrongheaded hope sets a trap." Contemporary preaching, then, following Augustine, seeks to form listeners to a hope that has been cast ahead like an anchor, firmly placed in the eternal, yet reaching back into the present.[547] This is preaching that "called them back to hope."[548] Hope is the critical component that enables appropriate engagement in this life animated by the next. Preaching that follows Augustine seeks to educate its listeners such that they can differentiate between temporal and eternal hopes, and so not only avoid the things that kill souls, but actively move toward that which enlivens. As Lamb notes,

> In light of his pedagogical purposes, his stark contrast between this-worldly and otherworldly hopes emerges less as a precise, philosophical statement about the value of temporal or eternal goods than an emotionally weighted opposition intended to reorder audiences' desire, chastening the presumption that the world is the ultimate source of goodness.[549]

Liturgical Preaching

Augustine's understanding of sermons as embedded within liturgical rhythms challenges an individualistic, entertainment-oriented approach often found in contemporary preaching. His recognition that sermons function within the ebb and flow of Christian life suggests that preaching

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[545] See, for example, Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
[546] See, especially, Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 2009, 194-197 where Smith refers to preaching as "re-narrating the world." This finds obvious connection with Augustine's perspective on preaching and his goals for it.
[547] "Now you know that all those Christians who are making progress are like good seed. These are the people who groan with longing for the heavenly city, who know they are on pilgrimage, who hold steadily to their road, and who by their desire for that abiding country have cast their hope ahead like an anchor." Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 42.1*
[548] Augustine, Sermon 87.10
[549] Lamb, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 131.

gains its formative power through consistent, communal engagement over time rather than isolated inspiring moments. Preaching is neither an isolated event, nor even the main aspect of a worship service. Protestant preachers would do well to recover an Augustinian perspective which sees preaching in service to the central act of Eucharistic celebration, assuming such a celebration occurs.[550]

The sermonic corpus of Augustine illustrates sermons dedicated to and situated within the larger liturgical life of the church, especially the liturgical calendar.[551] Preaching is not merely expository, then, but liturgically embedded over the seasons of the Christian year. As we saw in Sermon 255, preached during "alleluia time," Augustine's sermons are often directly related to or pulling themes from the liturgical season the church was in.[552] Thus, preaching to and for pilgrims is therefore properly located within the Christian calendar, and immerses itself in that calendar, taking its cue from the various themes, images and texts of each season. Contemporary sermons can then engage the redemptive story of God over the first half of the calendar and the maturation to live into that story over the second half.[553] Each sermon is not an isolated event, but builds on previous sermons throughout the year in a cumulative effect. Similarly, as Glowalsky noted, "The liturgical context and consistency of the audience provides a certain continuity and sense of progression to Augustine's preaching, which further distinguishes the sermon from most other oratorical genres."[554] Thus the liturgical calendar and Augustine's sermons within it function as mutually illuminating for one another. To travel through the liturgical year together as a congregation is to travel through the redemptive story of God, which in turn is to travel through and be nursed along in a sense of progression on the pilgrim path.

These sermons for pilgrims through the Christian year locate Christians within the wider ecumenical world, as well as emphasize the communal over the individual. Preaching that engages

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[550] Though now rather dated, for a survey of Protestant practices around the eucharist, see James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

[551] For an overview of the liturgical calendar, its history, significance, and development, see, Laurence Hull Stookey, *The Year of the Lord's Favor: A Guide to the Christian Year*, Abingdon Press, 1996; Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*. 2nd ed., Liturgical Press, 1991; and Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. Dacre Press, 1945.

[552] See the fuller discussion of Augustine's preaching in the liturgical calendar beginning on page 44 of this dissertation. For other examples of Augustine introducing his sermon text within the larger liturgical context, as well as examples of tying it to various previous readings in the worship for the day, see, *Expositions of the Psalms* 2 of Psalm 25.5; *Expositions of the Psalms* 29.1; 37.1; 40.1; 55.17; 57.1; 84.9; 90.1; 102,1.

[553] See, for example, Craddock, Fred B., et al., editors. *Preaching the Christian Year*. Trinity Press International, 1992.

[554] Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture,* 18.

the liturgical calendar is properly catholic in that it is shared across both congregations and communions. Such emphasis contradicts and counteracts an individualist consumer mentality toward the Church in general and preaching in particular. The goal of a sermon is not, therefore, whether someone "likes" it in the same way one likes an item on a buffet, but whether that sermon faithfully proclaimed Christ, sought to teach aspects of the Christian faith, delighted listeners through creative engagement, and moved the hearts and souls of Christians to make progress on their journey.

The Hermeneutics of Pilgrimage

Augustine's approach to Scripture as signpost—pointing beyond itself to Christ and the heavenly city—offers a framework for biblical interpretation that avoids both literalistic fundamentalism and reductionist historical criticism.[555] His method suggests that proper biblical engagement involves discerning how texts orient readers toward their ultimate destination.[556] Similarly, as each sermon of Augustine is littered with a variety of texts, contemporary preaching that seeks to mimic Augustine would view the sermon text not merely as an individual pericope. Rather, the text for each sermon would be, in the broadest sense, the entire canon of Scripture. A sermon may primarily exposit one text, but the canon is its larger context, and the gospel its condition. Contemporary preachers would do well to mirror Augustine's use of the Psalms not merely as the prayer of pilgrims, but as opportunities to sprinkle each sermon on other parts of the canon of Scripture with the pilgrim speech of the psalms.[557]

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[555] For a contemporary example which seeks to do the same, see Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. Brueggemann's provocative book hints at similar themes in this conclusion, though from the perspective of the church in exile, yet not fully the way Augustine understands the term. Brueggemann is suggesting preaching as a response to the church's perceived loss of cultural influence, primarily in North America. As a result, Brueggemann's thesis is primarily reactionary, whereas Augustine's motif is first and foremost theological and ontological.

[556] The work of George Lindbeck is especially in view here. For Lindbeck, learning a religion is akin to learning a language, so the primary lexicon and grammar of a Christian congregation is its liturgy. If, for Lindbeck, "to become a Christian involves learning the story of Isreal and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in it's terms" then this involves learning a "set of skills" that is embodied in historic liturgy. We learn how to be religious primarily through worship in "ritual, prayer and example." Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 21.

[557] Lindbeck is once again instructive. Whereas a cognitive understanding of doctrine assumes that "poetry, music, art and ritual" are "mere external decorations" in the service of "explicitly statable beliefs and precepts," or an experiential understanding of doctrine assumes that they are in the service of expressing an

Preaching as Patience

The metaphor of "scooping water from the sea" is relevant not merely to teaching complex doctrines, but to the sustained work of preaching. The duration and frequency of Augustine's preaching suggests that humility is proper to the preacher regarding what one sermon can accomplish. A proper approach to preaching must be patient, understanding that formation is often the slow work of the Holy Spirit over time. One of Augustine's favorite metaphors for preaching included persistent knocking on the text to release its ancient mysteries.[558] Similarly, to preach was both to be a tutor but also a fellow learner in the school of Christ.[559] Both of these images suggest the deliberate pace and approach that preaching requires. Preaching as formation, the sort that seeks to move souls, is more akin to water dripping on rock, a river slowly carving out a canyon, than it is to a firehose dousing a raging blaze.[560] Augustine understood that formation happens slowly, often in fits and starts, and maturation takes time. A wise preacher to pilgrims then, is patient with themselves, their congregation, and the work of the Spirit.

Similarly, preaching for pilgrims acknowledges the already and the not yet of the homiletical task, conceding the impossibility yet necessity of communicating divine mystery. This humility is particularly relevant in our digital age, where the temptation exists to believe that better technology,

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interior experience, these are better understood through a cultural linguistic lens as the primary way that the "basic patterns of religion are interiorized, exhibited and transmitted." Lindbeck, Nature of Doctrine, 22.

[558] "As we knock at the door, then, may the Lord open to us, and may his secret mysteries be revealed to us in the measure that he graciously wills." Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 67.10.

[559] "We stand in this elevated position as your instructors, but we are your fellow-students in this school under our one teacher." Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 126.3.

[560] Where Kreider sees a break between the Augustine and the earlier Christian tradition on patience as represented by Cyprian, I recognize continuity. As evidenced throughout the sermonic corpus of Augustine, he counsels patience with regularity, particularly when it comes to bearing up under trials, dealing with scandals and scoundrels in the church, and putting up with those who seem to do evil yet enjoy financial and physical success. Kreider argues that Augustine became impatient the longer he was a bishop, particularly with heretics (Pelagians) and schismatics (Donatists), and thus abandoned his earlier commitments to a more ideological approach. However, even in his later sermons, Augustine is consistently urging patience to his congregation. Even in his own machinations, both political and ecclesiastical, one notes not a radical break with Cyprian or a changed perspective, but a nuance that recognizes Christian patience is not necessarily indiscriminate. Even if one were to argue that Augustine's actions later in his bishopric betray a certain impatience, one need not necessarily suggest this constitutes a betrayal of an earlier perspective. Instead, as we saw with his sermon on Psalm 41 [42], a holy longing is a divinely instituted and necessary ingredient for hope. One might even say, a holy impatience, that draws the Christian along and that much closer to Christ. Alan Kreider, *Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 280-296.

platforms, or techniques can somehow contain or control spiritual transformation. The work of Chuck DeGroat is instructive here, cautioning against narcissism and spiritual immaturity within the preacher that belies and betrays pride, despair, or perhaps even both.[561] DeGroat notes that "in ministry, pastors use their congregations to validate a sense of identity and worth. The church becomes an extension of the narcissistic ego, and its ups and downs lead to seasons of ego inflation and ego deflation for the pastor." He also observes that narcissistic pastors "like the freedom and flexibility of creating worship experiences that center on the personality and sermon of the preacher." Preaching for pilgrims, however, displaces the pastor and preacher as the center of a worship experience or even a process of spiritual formation. Instead, such preaching centers on the redemptive story of God, eschewing pride in favor of humility, while orienting the listener evermore toward Christ.

The Character of the Preacher

In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine emphasizes that the preacher's life carries more weight than their eloquence offers crucial insights for leadership in an age of public scandals and authenticity crises. His recognition that scandals in the church are often seen most keenly when there is incongruence between message and messenger remains painfully relevant. As such, contemporary preachers seeking to preach pilgrim sermons would do well to be formed by the text they preach, such that, with Augustine, they bring only what they hear, and teach only where they have been taught.[562] Preachers who embody their message are more likely to gain a hearing through their sermons, but especially through their lives. Such preaching will seek transparent humility in the pursuit of holiness without succumbing either to pride or despair. Similarly, the humanity of the preacher must be maintained without either emotional manipulation or voyeuristic narcissism.[563] Preaching to pilgrims requires a preacher who is a fellow pilgrim, accountable to a community that supports pastoral integrity.

Preaching as Spiritual Direction

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561 See especially, Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2020).
562 Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm* 34.1
563 See especially, Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.

Perhaps most significantly, Augustine's approach suggests that preaching functions as corporate spiritual direction—guiding entire communities in their journey toward God. This challenges both purely academic approaches to biblical interpretation and purely therapeutic approaches to pastoral care. To be clear, I have in mind not spiritual direction as life advice, but rather the direction of a trained guide on the pilgrimage through this temporal existence toward eternity.

Augustine's vision of sermons as signposts on the pilgrim road offers contemporary Christianity a compelling alternative to both moralistic instruction and feel-good inspiration. It points toward preaching as a profound spiritual practice that forms communities capable of recognizing their true identity and living accordingly in the present age while maintaining hope for the age to come.[564] Augustine's integration of rigorous theology, compelling communication, and pastoral wisdom provides essential resources for those seeking to form resilient Christian communities capable of bearing witness to the gospel in challenging times.[565] The integration displayed in Augustine's preaching was in service to the formation of his congregation, and the theme to which we now turn.

Formation

Prayer as Formation in Desire and Hope

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564 The most compelling yet controversial case for these communities comes from Hauerwas and Willimon's influential *Resident Aliens,* 1989. A more recent approach from Rod Dreher sought to revitalize the church through "strategic withdrawal," as described in Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, New York: Sentinel, 2017. Both works drew significant praise as well as robust opposition. See significant critique from Oliver O'Donovan's *Desire of the Nations,* 1996 on withdrawal as a strategy and Jonathan Wilson's critique of withdrawal in *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue*, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997. Various neo-Calvinist critiques of Dreher's book include James KA Smith, Gideon Strauss, and Matthew Kaemingk.

565 While Taylor writes extensively examining how we moved from a society where belief in God was virtually unchallenged to one where it's just one option among many, his thesis that the West is post-Christian is not without its detractors. On the popular level, historian Tom Holland challenges this thesis in his book Dominion, noting the Christianity of the West did not disappear, so much as become disguised. Holland writes that the mores, values, and ethics of the West remain thoroughly Christian in their assumption. Taylor may concede the point, nodding instead in the direction of secularization in terms of self-consciously practicing Christians. See Taylor, A Secular Age, 2007 and Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, New York: Basic Books, 2019.

Augustine's pedagogy consistently emphasizes the formation of proper desire as central to Christian maturity.[566] Prayer functions as both expression and cultivation of desire, gradually shaping the human heart's fundamental orientation. This process occurs through what we might call "practiced longing"—the repeated articulation of eschatological hope that gradually transforms the fundamental attachments of the one praying.

The formation process proves complex and often counter-intuitive. Apparent disappointments in prayer serve to deepen rather than diminish spiritual longing. The "fanned fire" imagery captures Augustine's understanding of how divine pedagogy operates through the very experience of spiritual frustration. God's apparent "delays" in responding to prayer serve the higher purpose of purifying and intensifying desire that motivates prayer. Similarly, the emphasis of Augustine that those things which are good for us may be delayed, but never denied, offers the pilgrim a patient hope, with endurance as a gift of grace. His emphasis on the formation of desire through prayer speaks directly to contemporary concerns about consumer culture and the misdirection of human longing.[568] The "practiced longing" that Augustine advocates offers a concrete alternative to both acquisitive materialism and world-denying asceticism.

Aesthetic and Moral Formation in Worship

In this pilgrim church, worship functions as both foretaste of eternal praise and formation in pilgrim identity. As such, worship that is primarily or exclusively expressive is to be shunned in favor of worship that is primarily formative.[569] Such formation in worship is not, however, to shun aesthetics in favor of a bland or banal didacticism. Instead, the hints and whispers that the pilgrim picks up of the eternal song from the eternal city are to guide worship into beauty and goodness, as well as truth. As we saw in his Exposition of Psalm 41, where Augustine spoke of "that eternal, unfading festival melodious" with a "delightful sound reaches the ears of the heart,"[570] we can surmise that the

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566 See Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010; Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De libero arbitrio*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Han-luen Kantzer Komline, *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

568 See, Jean Daniélou, *Prayer: The Mission of the Church*, trans. David Louis Schindler, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

569 See, for example, John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*. Baker Academic, 2003.

570 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 41.10

delightful sound relates not merely an internal disposition but to physical and aural beauty. As Carol Harrison consistently points out, "Most effective are those revelations in which man grasps God as beautiful—for these serve to attract his attention and inspire his love and desire to attain their source."[571] Harrison notes that, for Augustine, the incarnation of Christ is the key that unlocks the proper human response to beauty, for the world that Christ enters "is saved by God, who is Beauty, and by the revelation of Himself as Beauty."[572] Harrison demonstrates that for Augustine, beauty finds its source and summit in God, thus aesthetic appreciation is appreciation not only of creation, but of the Creator. Augustine's emphasis on beauty and attraction to Christ suggests the church invest in beautifying its liturgy, music, and architecture to reflect eternal beauty, not just functional gathering or expressive emotivism.

So too, then, congregational participation in worship is to be prioritized over both expressive individualism or professional performance. If the pilgrim church is corporate, then its worship ought to be communal. While these categories are obviously foreign to fourth and fifth century worship, one thinks of the multiple references in Augustine's sermons to congregational chanting of the psalm in worship itself or his insistence that the congregation sing the psalms with pure hearts. That the congregation chanted the psalm he was preaching on was taken for granted. The question was not whether they sang, but how: "This is what we sang, and here we are at last, our sermon has caught up with this verse. Let us say it, and sing it intelligently, and pray as we sing it, and may our prayer be heard…"[573]

Worship that is formative is also attractive in that it attracts through beauty, not merely moral obligation. The pilgrim church pays attention to the ways that beauty forms and reforms in its architecture, music, art, and preaching. This is, as Stewart-Kroeker noted, is a formation of aesthetics.[574] A pilgrim church on its way to ultimate beauty should reflect that beauty where possible in the present. Stewart-Kroeker again reflects an Augustinian sensibility when she writes, "The Church offers a foretaste of the heavenly party. The church, like Christ, draws people in by appealing to their aesthetic senses."[575] Instead of an attractional ecclesial model that seeks to bend church to the aesthetic whims of culture, Augustine's preaching suggests that the aesthetic tastes of

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571 Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 272.
572 Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*, 273.
573 Augustine, Exposition 2 of Psalm 18.
574 Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 171.
575 Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage As Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 175.

the pilgrim people are to be formed themselves to reflect a sense of the beauty that they are on the way toward. While not a discussion of taste, preaching for pilgrims does suggest that the church ought to cultivate and celebrate beauty in its life and worship. Aesthetic, moral, and spiritual development happen together, and therefore are to be planned together.[576]

Community Formation and the Practice of Prayer

Augustine's emphasis on the Psalms as the Church's prayer book reflects his conviction that Christian formation occurs primarily within ecclesial community rather than through individual effort. The liturgical setting of psalm-prayer proves theologically significant: individual voices join the corporate voice of the Church, which in turn participates in the eternal voice of Christ. A contemporary spiritual discipline should then focus on the Psalms in its prayer life, both individually and corporately.[577] Learning to pray the psalms as the voice of Christ, the dual voice of head and body, is a primary site of formation for the pilgrim people.[578]

This communal dimension of prayer serves multiple formative functions. It prevents the privatization of Christian spirituality, maintaining the essential connection between personal devotion and ecclesial identity. It provides a concrete means for "practicing" the eschatological community that represents Christianity's ultimate goal. Most significantly, it offers a foretaste of the eternal liturgy of praise that awaits in the heavenly city.[579] To pray the psalms is to pray Christ's words after him, in him, and through him, and thus to pray now the language of eternity.

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[576] On worship and the life of the church, see for example, Aidan Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984; Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, and Paul Bradshaw, eds., *The Study of Liturgy*, Rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000; Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008; Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

[577] See, for example, John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources*. Eerdmans, 2007.

[578] On praying the psalms, see Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951; Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007; Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000; Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1956; Matthias Neuman, *How to Read and Pray the Psalms*, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1997.

[579] Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 41.9, "The sweet strains of that celebration are wafted into the ears of one who walks in the tent and ponders the wonderful works of God in the redemption of believers..."

The reciprocal relationship between the individual and the community in prayer reflects Augustine's broader theological anthropology. Just as individuals become fully themselves only within the context of community, so individual prayer achieves its proper form only within the larger context of ecclesial worship. While individual prayer is important and not subordinate to corporate prayer, it must be properly located as part of the corporate voice of the Body, as opposed to singular speech. Such formative prayer encourages a selfless disposition in the praying life, seeking primarily to pray for and with others, as opposed to understanding prayer as a wish list of temporal concerns. Prayer becomes genuinely personal (because it participates in Christ's own relationship with the Father) while remaining essentially communal (because it occurs as part of the mystical Body).

Augustine's sophisticated treatment of the temporal-eternal relationship in prayer offers resources for addressing perennial questions about petitionary prayer. Augustine articulates a hierarchical integration that validates temporal needs while maintaining eschatological priority. This framework proves particularly valuable for addressing contemporary concerns about "prosperity theology" and other reductive approaches to prayer.[580]

The reciprocal dynamics Augustine identifies in prayer—the way prayer simultaneously requires and generates faith, desire, hope, and other spiritual goods—provides insight into how divine grace operates through human agency without overwhelming it. This "non-competitive" understanding of divine-human cooperation offers valuable resources for theological anthropology more generally.

Prayer as Pilgrim Sighs

Augustine's understanding of prayer as pilgrim speech represents a mature synthesis of his theological insights into the nature of Christian existence, the person and work of Christ, and the eschatological orientation of the Church. By situating prayer within the overarching framework of pilgrimage, Augustine illuminates both the necessity and the nature of Christian prayer in ways that address perennial questions while remaining sensitive to the particular challenges of his historical context.

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[580] For a robust survey of prosperity theology, see Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 and Dena Freeman, ed., *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

The theological sophistication of Augustine's approach lies in his ability to hold together apparent tensions without resolving them prematurely. The pilgrim prays from within time while oriented toward eternity, from within individual need while participating in corporate identity, from within human limitation while sharing divine relationship. These tensions prove theologically productive rather than problematic, generating the reciprocal dynamics that characterize authentic spiritual growth. The key, as Jean Danielou notes, drawing on an Augustinian frame, is to recognize "everything speaks to us of God because we live in a world that comes entirely from him. This universe of symbols is such that, if our hearts were filled with God, we would see him in all things."[581] Such a disposition illuminates pilgrim prayer as a practice that forms the one praying toward their eternal end through their temporal location.

Augustine's vision of prayer as the "heaving of pilgrim sighs" captures both the poignancy and the hope that mark Christian existence in the interim between Christ's resurrection and return. Prayer emerges as neither mere petition for divine assistance nor abstract contemplation of eternal truth, but as the fundamental speech of those who recognize their essential homelessness in this world and their ultimate destiny in the city of God. Again, Danielou illustrates an Augustinian sensibility when he writes,

> Prayer is not at all a sentimental attitude or spiritual affectivity; rather, it is an inward confrontation and vanquishing of the flesh. So it is to the extent that we gain this victory in prayer that we become capable in the rest of our lives of putting things in their true place. In this sense, the object of prayer is the forming of fundamental dispositions, which in turn permeate the rest of our lives.[582]

For Augustine, the fundamental disposition is that of pilgrimage, and prayer is its practice *par excellence.*

The implications extend beyond individual spirituality to encompass ecclesiology, theological anthropology, and eschatology. If prayer is indeed the native tongue of pilgrims, then the Church's primary vocation becomes the formation of communities capable of sustaining this speech across generations and cultures. Christian education becomes training in the proper accent of pilgrim

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[581]Jean Daniélou, *Prayer and the Mission of the Church*, trans. David Louis Schindler Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 4.
[582] Daniélou, *Prayer*, 7.

speech.[583] Liturgical worship becomes the collective practice of a language that individual Christians can speak authentically only as members of a larger community of speakers.

Perhaps most significantly, Augustine's understanding locates Christian prayer within the grand narrative of salvation history while maintaining its relevance for the most intimate concerns of individual believers. The pilgrim who "heaves sighs" for the heavenly city prays neither as an isolated individual seeking personal benefit nor as an abstract soul pursuing mystical union, but as a member of Christ's body participating in his eternal relationship with the Father through the Spirit.

This vision challenges contemporary Christianity to recover both the cosmic scope and the personal intimacy that characterize authentic Christian prayer. In an age marked by both religious privatization and institutional decline, Augustine's theology of prayer as pilgrim speech offers resources for renewal that honor both the transcendent claims and the immediate relevance of Christian faith.

The Now and Not Yet of Formation

Nested within his overall framework of formation, Augustine's emphasis on joy as the posture appropriate to the pilgrim finds rich resonance. Augustine's "now and not yet" understanding of joy challenges both over-realized and under-realized eschatologies.[584] Contemporary churches often swing between triumphalism (acting as if the kingdom has fully arrived) and defeatism (postponing all hope to the afterlife). Augustine's pilgrim joy suggests authentic Christian existence involves participating genuinely in eternal realities while acknowledging incomplete fulfillment. This has profound implications for how churches understand their mission, worship, and hope.[585]

Augustine's "horizontal complement" (as Clair terms it) suggests that authentic spiritual joy must integrate both vertical relationship with God and horizontal engagement with temporal realities. This challenges false dichotomies between mystical and prophetic spiritualities, suggesting

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583 See especially, Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 2009, as well as Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010; David I. Smith and James K.A. Smith, eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

584 For a brief overview of rival eschatologies, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1979.

585 N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, 657-662.

joy emerges precisely through faithful engagement with present circumstances while maintaining eschatological orientation. Joy is not relegated to the future, but comes from the future to the present, infusing the temporal with the eternal.[586]

Formation in and for Joy

Augustine's distinction between happiness (circumstance-dependent) and joy (God-dependent) offers resources for contemporary discussions of mental health, resilience, and spiritual formation. While not dismissing clinical treatment, it suggests cultivating practices that ground identity and hope in transcendent reality rather than temporal circumstances. This has implications for pastoral care, spiritual direction, and therapeutic approaches. A pilgrim perspective on joy as existing in both the temporal and eternal realms suggests that pastoral care, spiritual direction, and therapeutic approaches within this temporal sphere are legitimate resources for the pilgrim to avail themselves of. The pilgrim need not fear the therapeutic, nor be entirely defined by it. Joy is not defined by circumstances, and neither is the pilgrim defined by pathologies.

Augustine's recognition that "groaning also has room for joy" provides framework for holding sorrow and joy simultaneously rather than requiring their sequential replacement. This challenges therapeutic models that view grief as problem to be solved and offers resources for ministering with those experiencing loss, trauma, or chronic illness while maintaining authentic hope. Suffering is to be expected, yet not indulged as an end in itself; anticipated, yet not acquiesced to as if it were final.

By recognizing the human condition as one of groaning and struggle, it normalizes and validates suffering without pathologizing or excusing it.[587] Similarly, as deer walk better together, so the pilgrim church bear one another's burdens, carrying them in community rather than in isolation. The pilgrim church is a powerful antidote to contemporary loneliness, offering community and companions on a journey where far too many feel abandoned and forlorn.[588] A pilgrim orientation toward the future offers hope in the present, for the destination lies ahead, and current

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586 For a treatment of joy in worship, see Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.
587 See, for example, Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015.
588 For contemporary anxieties, see Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, New York: Penguin Press, 2024.

circumstances are only a portion of the whole frame. Indeed, this pilgrim motif encourages humility even in the realm of mental health and spiritual care, recognizing each wayfarer as those who themselves are not yet finished, not yet at rest, for they are not yet at home.

Similarly, Augustine's dual emphasis on joy as both gift and calling suggests spiritual formation involves both receptivity and practice.[589] Contemporary discipleship models can learn from his integration of grace-enabled effort, avoiding both works-righteousness and antinomianism. Joy becomes both evidence of grace and a goal of spiritual practices.

Augustine's warning against "false joys" and emphasis on joy's proper source offers prophetic critique of consumer culture's promise of happiness through acquisition.[590] His framework suggests authentic fulfillment comes through participation in eternal goods rather than temporal consumption, with implications for Christian approaches to materialism, advertising, and economic systems. So too, then, Augustine's pilgrim framework fundamentally challenges prosperity theology's equation of faithfulness with temporal blessing. His "pilgrim joy" suggests authentic Christian joy transcends circumstances while remaining engaged with them, offering alternative to both prosperity gospel and stoic withdrawal. Augustine's understanding of pilgrims as already participating in eternal realities while working toward their fuller manifestation provides theological grounding for social justice work that avoids both utopianism and fatalism. Christians can work for temporal improvement while recognizing ultimate hope lies beyond political solutions, maintaining what Reinhold Niebuhr called "impossible possibility."[591]

The contemporary rediscovery of contemplative practices finds resonance in Augustine's emphasis on practices that cultivate receptivity to divine joy.[592] However, his integration of contemplation with ecclesial life and ethical engagement challenges purely individualistic

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589 For wider treatments of Christian joy, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004; Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015;

590 For a liberation theology critique of Christian acquisitiveness, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Rev. ed.; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

591 Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 109

592 While Foster popularized a retrieval of Christian practice, studies examining those practices are more recent still. See, for example, Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Rev. ed.; San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1988; for the continuation and study of, see Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001* and Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry,* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008.

spiritualities.[593] These implications suggest Augustine's "pilgrim joy" offers significant resources for contemporary Christian thought and practice, providing frameworks for integrating spiritual depth with social engagement, theological sophistication with pastoral sensitivity, and eschatological hope with present faithfulness. His approach challenges both secular therapeutic models and shallow religious alternatives while offering substantive vision for human flourishing grounded in divine grace and oriented toward ultimate fulfillment in God. It is this substantive vision of flourishing within the pilgrim community that we examine next.

Ministry and Mission as the Noble Caravan

Ecumenical Ecclesiology

Augustine's vision of the "noble caravan" offers a third way beyond the dominant contemporary polarities. Though Augustine ministered in an era before official schism into East and West, his context was marked by schism and controversy nonetheless. Rival bishops, cathedrals, and communities existed throughout the world. In an era marked by both triumphalistic and defeatist approaches to church life, Augustine's vision of the noble caravan provides a third way.

While sectarianism is often associated with negative connotations, George Lindbeck sees catholic sectarianism as not necessarily divisive but instead that which "points to the intensity and intimacy of the communal life of a minority sharply differentiated from the larger society."[594] In fact, a sectarian identity will be necessary not only for the thriving of faith communities, but for their very survival. Human beings are primarily social animals, and therefore if they are to maintain a specific identity and way of life, they will need to do so together. On this note, religion and the sociology of knowledge work together to underscore the notion that in order to maintain "patterns of belief and conduct" that are unique, Christians necessarily need to form "cohesive groups of the like-minded in order to mutually support each other in maintaining their minority definitions of the real and the good."[595]

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[593] For a prominent example of contemporary re-examination of the popularity of Christian practices, see Lauren F. Winner*, The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage and Sin,* Yale University Press, 2020.
[594] George Lindbeck, "Ecumenism and the Future of Belief", *Una Sancta* 25 (1968), as published in *The Church in a Postliberal Age,* edited James J. Buckley; (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) p. 100; hereafter *Ecumenism.*
[595] Lindbeck, "Ecumenism", 93.

Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology offers a pre-modern link to Lindbeck's post-secular catholic sectarianism.[596] The church need neither claim premature perfection nor despair over present failures. Instead, the church can embrace its status as pilgrim people—dignified by its calling yet honest about its incompleteness, hopeful about its destination yet realistic about its present journey. As pilgrim, the church acknowledges its "unfinished" quality while maintaining dignity. The church must lament its scandals and failure, yet instead of despair over them, the unfinished quality of the church encourages a reformation of itself in its movement toward its head. The church can be both noble and incomplete, dignified yet honest about present limitations.

The pilgrim motif offers ecumenical resources for a dispersed and dilapidated church.[597] As those on a shared journey, different Christian traditions can recognize themselves as fellow travelers rather than competitors, and co-laborers rather than contestants. Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology lends itself to an ecumenical humility. All traditions have within them the *per mixtum* of the good and the bad, and no single tradition can claim to have arrived at final ecclesial perfection. So too, a pilgrim church fosters an ecumenical *docilitas*, a teachable spirit that seeks to learn from other traditions, while noting a unity of purpose even amid diversity of practice.[598]

Corporate Spirituality

The corporate emphasis of Augustine's pilgrim vision also speaks to contemporary challenges. As we saw in his perspective on preaching, so Augustine's ecclesial emphasis that the journey is taken *as* the body of Christ (not merely *with* it) challenges individualistic assumptions. Against individualistic models of spiritual formation, Augustine insists that the journey toward God occurs as the body of Christ.[599] Formation happens in community, through community, for community—not as individual

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[596] With an obvious link to this project, Lindbeck refers to the church as "the messianic pilgrim people of God typologically shaped by Israel's story. ", Lindbeck, "The Church," 146.
[597] Lindbeck's work is once again in view, with a lifetime of ecumenical engagement. See especially *Nature of Doctrine*, 1984.
[598] David Rylaarsdam, "A Teachable Teacher: *Docilitas* and the Vocation of John Calvin." In *Marginal Resistance: Essays in Honor of John C. Vander Stelt*. Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2001.
[599] For contemporary ecclesiologies, see, for example, Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed.; New York: Image Books, 2002; Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008; Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996; Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014; Gerald O'Collins and Mario Farrugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; and Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Works of God*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

self-actualization. While the individual is not bypassed in favor of the corporate, it is taken up and woven into the tapestry thereby creating a whole. So too, a pilgrim ecclesiology provides the counter formation necessary to critique consumeristic attitudes toward spirituality. Participation in the larger body of Christ is not about one's tastes or preferences, but about the pursuit of holiness on the pilgrim journey. Because this journey is communal and public, it expands a privatized faith curved in on itself.

Time Between

Augustine's "time in between" pilgrim ecclesiology offers practical wisdom for the church as an institution. Recognizing its contingency and dependency on Christ allows the church in the present a strategic patience, avoiding both over-realized expectations that assume programs will "fix"the church and under-realized despair. The eschatological motivation of the pilgrim church garners meaning from the future for its present. Such an orientation can both assuage a crisis of meaning many may currently feel, while tempering any excessive enthusiasm with a serene forbearance. The primary posture for a pilgrim church may be a "holy ambivalence."[600]

Augustine's framework provides resources for current challenges of some congregations feeling the pinch of cultural displacement while others note an increased moment of opportunity and openness. Churches feeling exiled in post-Christendom contexts can embrace their pilgrim status without despair and churches feeling confident can do so without pride. The pilgrim church as tent of wayfarers is a metaphor that offers provisional yet genuine shelter for spiritual refugees.

The Pilgrim Journey as Missional Journey

The pilgrim framework reshapes evangelism and mission in that it becomes an invitation to the journey, not a single decision as if it were the destination. A pilgrim ecclesiology is missional in that it invites fellow travelers to join along the noble caravan of pilgrims, as opposed to presenting itself as the final destination.[601] This missional perspective invites humility within the church, and patience

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[600] Brad East, "Holy Ambivalence." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 1 Mar. 2018, lareviewofbooks.org/article/holy-ambivalence/. "There is no living beyond one's time: perseverance does not mean impatience."
[601] See, for example, Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995; Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran*

from those on the outside looking curiously in. Pilgrim evangelism would emphasize a shared longing common to all humanity, the *sensus divinitas* carved by the finger of God onto the stone heart of humankind.[602] Mission then becomes helping others recognize their deep longing for God as the source of their search for meaning, while offering companionship on the journey to that source.

Pilgrim Preaching for the Spiritually Homeless

Augustine's pilgrim framework speaks powerfully to contemporary experiences of displacement, uncertainty, and spiritual searching.[603] His vision of the Christian life as journey toward home offers both realism about present difficulties and hope for ultimate resolution. This vision encourages a missional approach to preaching that is at once contextual and ethnographic in nature. Preaching that moves will ultimately fan into flame the desires of every human heart toward their ultimate end, tapping into the longing newly and perhaps keenly felt in a time where many experience disintegration and a crisis of meaning. Such preaching for pilgrims is not limited to moralistic instruction, but nonetheless takes seriously the rigorous, even ascetic, moral component of a pilgrim faith. Similarly, this preaching is not limited to a inspirational pep talk, but is nonetheless inspiring through sermons that move with a persistent call to holiness. For those caught in malaise, preaching to pilgrims does seek progress in the life of faith, and movement along the path. This missional component understands that desire for transcendence is not to be indulged in temporal satisfactions, nor ignored or evaded, but stoked so long as it is oriented to the Good it was created for. This "holy love" does not drag the seeker down, but lifts her up and "raises the soul to heavenly thoughts and kindles in it a longing for eternal realities, arousing its desire for what neither passes nor dies, and

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Contribution, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005; and Clayton J. Schmit, *Worship as Evangelism: Exploring Liturgy's Hospitable and Transformative Potential*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

602 "That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*sensus divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead.... ...this is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget." John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 3.

603 See, especially, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. Taylor's magnum opus has been widely written about since its publication. For contemporary ecclesial interactions, see the "Ministry in a Secular Age" series from Andrew Root: Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017; *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God,* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019; *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.

lifting it from the depth of hell to heaven."[604] Similarly, pilgrim preaching encourages an evangelistic engagement with a community seeking meaning that might otherwise not be inclined to look for it in the Church.

Such preaching also has the potential for significant pastoral care for those experiencing a loss of meaning as an occasion for malaise. Addiction, suicidal ideation, and other mental health challenges will not be alleviated by pilgrim preaching, but they can be addressed and located within a larger framework of Christian hope in the midst of despair.[605] Such preaching can honestly acknowledge struggle, the sighing as a result of suffering in this life so frequently mentioned by Augustine, while maintaining hope for eternity. Preaching to and for pilgrims names each individual not as isolated, but as part of a community of meaning seekers, fellow pilgrims on the path.

Leadership and Authority

Augustine's pilgrim ecclesiology suggests leadership as pastoral more than professional. Christian pastors and preachers are those who help the caravan navigate the pilgrim path as one pilgrim among others, not administrators of institutional success or the embodiment of banal managerialism. Church leaders are to be lamp bearers in a dark world reflecting and refracting the light of Christ to illuminate this present darkness. A pilgrim church emphasizes preaching and teaching that illuminates the path forward rather than just providing information. So too, pilgrim leaders cultivate hope, and fan into flame a holy longing rather than offering false comfort.[606]

Pre-modern Preaching for a Post-Secular Church

I hope to have shown in this concluding chapter that Augustine's preaching for a pilgrim church offers what the contemporary church desperately needs: a mature and hopeful vision that neither claims too much nor settles for too little. We have explored implications of Augustine's preaching, pilgrim ecclesiology, prayer, and joy for the contemporary church to explore in its own preaching, formation, and wider ministry as a pilgrim people. Further research might interrogate the connection

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[604] Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 121.1.

[605] See, especially, Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

[606] See, for example, Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1983.

between Augustine's conception of beauty and his understanding of formation. Similarly, additional work on the the pilgrimage motif within the existing robust discourse on Augustine and participation is ripe for future exploration. An investigation into Augustine on the sacraments within the pilgrim theme also holds promise. Furthermore, research on Augustine's figural exegesis and how it relates to and further expounds the pilgrimage frame holds significant promise.

Finally, Augustine's pre-modern preaching can still move the souls of post-secular people, forming them for the pilgrim journey they face as the noble caravan of pilgrims. Preaching that moves churches toward a confident but not triumphalistic, honest but not despairing, engaged but not captive, beautiful but not perfect, communal but not insular posture along the way. The sermons of an ancient bishop are a vital source of hope, encouragement, and grace for pilgrims still wending their way on the path to eternity, and those who sing as they go.

> Walk in the way with all nations, walk in the way with all peoples, O you children of grace, children of the one Catholic Church; walk in the way, and sing as you go. This is what wayfarers do to lighten their fatigue. You do the same. Sing along the road. Through the way himself I beg you, sing in this way, and sing a new song. Let no one still sing the old song there; sing love-songs about your homeland, and let the old songs be heard on no one's lips anymore. A new way, a new wayfarer, and a new song.[607]

[607] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 66.6*.

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