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Robert Edward Mackenzie Dowler

Songs of Love
A Pastoral Reading of St Augustine of Hippo's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

(one volume)

Ph.D. Thesis

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University of Durham

Department of Theology and Religion

2007



- 5 FEB 2007

My soul, bear thou thy part,
Triumph in God above:
And with a well-tuned heart
Sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days
Till life shall end,
Whate'er he send,
Be filled with praise.

From the hymn, *Ye holy angels bright*, by Richard Baxter and others
(*New English Hymnal*: 475)

My weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me.
Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror quocumque feror.

conf. 13.9.10

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 5:5

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

Philippians 2:5-7.



Abstract

Robert Edward Mackenzie Dowler

Songs of Love:
A Pastoral Reading of St Augustine of Hippo's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

The Psalms were central to Augustine's life and ministry. His account of his early life and conversion in the *Confessions* is saturated with references to them. He presided over a liturgy in which they were sung daily, and he died with their words on his lips.

In this thesis, I offer a new reading of Augustine's expositions of the Psalms, based on the premise that they are principally to be understood as a work of pastoral theology. Throughout the thesis, I stress that the great majority of the *Enarrationes* are living texts, delivered in the day-to-day pastoral context of Augustine's episcopal ministry, to a living and mixed congregation.

The four main chapters of the thesis explore different aspects of Augustine's pastoral theology as they emerge in the *Enarrationes*: his attitude to the task of preaching (chapter one); his approach to the issue of church members' attendance at public entertainments (chapter two); his attempt to apply the Neoplatonic theme of ascent to God in a pastoral setting (chapter three); and his account of how a theology in which grace is central can be lived out in practice (chapter four).

Throughout the thesis, I argue that love is the inspiration and foundation of Augustine's pastoral theology and practice, and therefore provides the connecting thread between these different aspects of the *Enarrationes*. Love of God and neighbour is, for Augustine, the true content of all scripture and preaching. Love motivates the preacher to preach, and the congregation to listen. Love is the end-point to which all preaching must eventually lead.

The centrality of love in the work of Augustine is widely recognised. However, this thesis seeks to illuminate some of the particular ways in which Augustine's preaching on the Psalms enables members of his congregation to inhabit more fully God's own life of love, into which they have been incorporated by their membership of the body of Christ, whose voice Augustine hears speaking in every psalm

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Declaration

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Since, as I understand it, she is to be an examiner, I am not sure whether this breaches protocol, but I feel I must acknowledge the work of Sister Maria Boulding. Without her fresh and engaging translations of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, with their concise, but penetrating annotations, I would have seriously floundered. I am also deeply indebted throughout the thesis to the work of Peter Brown and R.A. Markus.

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Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Anna for her enormous understanding and support, throughout the time I have worked on this project.

Abbreviations and Details of Primary Works Used in the Thesis[1]

These are generally quoted English, but the Latin is also given, when it seems particularly relevant to the argument being made.

1. Works of Augustine

Abbrev.	Latin Title	English Title	PL	Translation(s used[2]
cat. rud.	*De catechizandis rudibus*	*On the Instruction of Beginners*	40	NPNF 3; Canning (2006)
ciu.	*De ciuitate Dei*	*City of God*	41	Dyson (1998
conf.	*Confessiones*	*Confessions*	32	Boulding (1997); Chadwick (1991)
corrept.	*De correptione et gratia*	*On Admonition and Grace*	44	FC 2; NPNF
dial.	*De dialectica*	*On Dialectic*	32	Jackson (1975)
doc. chr.	*De Doctrina Christiana*	*On Christian Teaching*	34	Hill (1996)
ench.	*Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate liber unus*	*Enchiridion*	40	Harbert (1999)
en. ps.	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*	*Expositions of the Psalms*	36-7	Boulding (2000-4)
ep.	*Epistulae*	*Letters*	33	(various)
c. ep. Pel.	*Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum*	*Against two letters of the Pelagians*	40	NPNF 5
Gn. adu. Man.	*De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos*	*On Genesis against the Manichees*	34	FC 84
gr. et lib. arb.	*De gratia et libero arbitrio*	*On Grace and Free Will*	44	NPNF 5
Io. eu. tr.	*In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*	*Tractates on the Gospel of John*	35	FC 78, 79, 8 90, 92.
c. Iul. imp.	*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*	*Against Julian, an Unfinished Book*	45	
lib. arb.	*De libero arbitrio*	*On Free Will*	32	Williams (1993)
mag.	*De magistro*	*The Teacher*	32	ACW 9
mend.	*De mendacio*	*On Lying*		FC 16
mor.	*De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus*	*On the Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life*	32	NPNF 4

[1] This table draws on Fitzgerald (1999a).

[2] Occasionally, translations not listed here are used, if these seem to make a particular point more strongly, while still remaining consonant with the original sense.

	Manichaeorum			
perseu.	*De dono perseuerantiae liber ad Prosperum et Hilarium secundus*	*On the Gift of Perseverance*	45	NPNF 5
praed. sanct.	*De praedestinatione sanctorum*	*On the Predestination of the Saints*	44	NPNF 5
reg.	*Regula*	*The Rule: Monastic Order*		Sr Agatha Mary & Bonner (2004)
retr.	*Retractationum libri duo*	*Reconsiderations*	32	FC 60
s.	*sermones*	*Sermons*	38	(various)
Simpl.	*Ad Simplicianum*	*To Simplicianus*	40	LCC 6
trin.	*De Trinitate*	*On the Trinity*	42	Hill (1991)
util. cred.	*De utilitate credendi liber unus*	*On the Advantage of Believing*	42	NPNF 3

2. Works of other authors

Author	Abbrev.	Latin Title	English Title	Original Text	Translation used
John Cassian	*Coll.* 13	*Collatio* 13	*Thirteenth Conference, On Divine Protection*	PL 49	Ramsey (1997)
	diu.	*De diuitiis*	*On Riches*	PLS 1	Rees (1998)
Cyprian	*de op. et eleem.*	*De opere et eleemosynis*	*On Good Works and Almsgiving*	PL 4	FC 36
Pelagius	*ad Dem.*	*Epistula ad sacram Christi virginem Demetriadem*	*Letter to Demetrias*	PL 30, 33	Rees (1998)
Plotinus	*Enn.*	*Enneads*			Mackenna (1991)
Tertullian	*spect.*	*De spectaculis*	*On the Shows*	PL 1	FC 40
Tyconius	*Lib. Reg.*	*Liber Regularum*	*Book of Rules*	Babcock (1989)	Babcock (1989)

NPNF Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
FC Fathers of the Church
PL Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina

Chapter One

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

The Spoken and Written Context of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

Introduction: Language and its difficulties

Perhaps Augustine's most engaging account of the difficulties that human beings[1] encounter when they try to use language is found not in any overtly theoretical analysis of the question but in his more practical and anecdotal reflections on the task of instructing those who are enquiring about the Christian faith. Augustine's work *De catechizandis rudibus*, written to the deacon Deogratias, at around AD400, explores some of the difficulties inherent in the work of pre-catechesis, the time 'following the proclamation of the Christian message and preceding reception into the catechumenate in the proper sense of the term'.[2] Deogratias has laid before Augustine some difficulties in delivering an address to newcomers to the faith that is anything other than dull and distasteful.[3] In response, Augustine discusses his dissatisfaction with his own inability to express to his pupils the fullness of the saving knowledge that he carries in his heart. His words always fail him:

> I am nearly always dissatisfied with the address that I give. For the address I am so eager to offer is the superior one which I enjoy again and again in my inner being before I begin to formulate it in spoken words. And when I find that my actual address fails to express what I have before my mind, I am depressed by the fact that my tongue has been unable to keep up with my intellect.[4]

The catechist performs his duties constantly aware of the profound disjunction between, on the one hand, the relative *clarity* of the truth as he is able to grasp it internally and, on the other, the *opacity* of the truth that he is able to pass on to another person in the clumsy and sequential medium of language:

---

[1] An attempt is made throughout the thesis to use inclusive language where possible. This has only been dropped when the result becomes linguistically awkward – unfortunately, fairly often!
[2] Canning (2006), 15, n.12; on Augustine's purpose in *cat. rud.*, cf. Canning (2006), 11-19.
[3] Cf. *cat. rud.* 1.1-2.
[4] *cat. rud.* 2.3: *Nam et mihi prope semper sermo meus displicet. Melioris enim avidus sum, quo saepe fruor interius, antequam eum explicare uerbis sonantibus coepero: quod ubi minus quam mihi notus est evaluero, contristor linguam meam cordi meo non potuisse sufficere.*

...insight floods the mind as with a sudden flash of light (*rapida coruscatione*), whereas speech is slow-moving and drawn-out and of a very different nature. And while speech is still spinning out the words, that intellectual insight has already vanished into its secluded domain.[5]

Of course, the process is not absolutely impossible, otherwise all catechesis would be doomed to failure. The pupil, using his memory, is able slowly to piece together the tedious and tortuous syllables[6] that emerge from the catechist's mouth, so that eventually coherent sense can be made of them. It is possible that he might even find the discourse enjoyable. But the process by which communication takes place is always fraught with difficulties.

Augustine provides a more theoretical analysis of this disjunction between inner and outer words in *De Trinitate*:

...the word which makes a sound outside is the sign of the word which lights up inside, and it is this latter that primarily deserves the name of 'word'. For the one that is uttered by the mouth of flesh is really the sound of a 'word', and it is called 'word' too because of the one which assumes it in order to be manifested outwardly... That word of man...is neither uttered in sound nor thought of in the likeness of sound which necessarily belongs to some language, but which precedes all the signs that signify it and is begotten of the knowledge abiding in the consciousness, when this knowledge is uttered just exactly as it is. When it is uttered vocally, or by some bodily sign, it is not uttered just exactly as it is, but as it can be seen or heard through the body.[7]

The speaker, then, conceives in his heart the primary, prelinguistic utterance – a 'word' in the truest sense. Once he has done this, he gropes for the appropriate sign that will best communicate that word to his listener. As Rist puts it, '[i]nner words are "nude" to the thinker and are (later) "clothed" in words'.[8] The word that is actually uttered embodies the primary, pre-linguistic word in a system of

---

[5] *cat. rud.* 2.3.
[6] Cf. *cat. rud.* 10.15.
[7] *trin.* 15.11.20; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 47.4; cf. Harrison (1992); Kirwan (1989); Louth (1989). ch. 3; Matthews (2005), ch. 4; Rist (1994) ch. 2; Watson (1998).
[8] Rist (1994), 38.

conventional symbols which, while they are able to convey something of the internal utterance, consistently fail to do it justice.[9]

As the speaker utters his word, it does not leave him but remains with him – as, in the important Christological parallel that will be discussed below, God remains God when he sends out *his* Word. As the speaker speaks, the 'outer' word – the sign of the inner one – is conveyed, *via* the medium of the voice, or some other carrier of signs, to the senses of the listener. If the speaker should decide to write instead of speaking, he introduces a further remove into the process because now he will need to find the appropriate written sign to represent the verbal one. As Augustine puts it in *De dialectica*,

> Every word is a sound, for when it is written it is not a word but the sign of a word. When we read, the letters we see suggest to the mind the sounds of the utterance. For written letters indicate to the eyes something other than themselves and indicate to the mind utterances beyond themselves... Therefore, what we read are not words but signs of words.[10]

Once the word has been spoken or written, the listener or reader will, in turn, apprehend it through his sensory organs, so that ultimately, his own understanding is informed by it. He will, it is hoped, but certainly not guaranteed, be able to hear or read the *signum* that has been uttered and, subsequently, turn it into a *res* which informs his understanding and is stored up for future use in his memory.[11] The fact that, in Augustine's understanding of it, human communication is carried on by such a complex system of translation and transmission instils little confidence in human beings' ability to understand one another. It is hardly surprising that the catechist finds that things can go wrong.[12] As Harrison writes,

> In a philosophical context inspired by Platonism, language, which is the expression of what is conceived inwardly in contemplative vision, cannot but be regarded as a degenerate movement outwards towards the distracting imitation and images of the senses, away from the intellectual

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[9] Cf. Markus (1996), 95.
[10] *dial.* 5.7; cf. Fyler (1988), 77-8.
[11] Cf. *conf.* 10.9.16.
[12] Cf. Louth (1989), 155.

vision. Like all corporeal reality, it is given a place as merely temporal and mutable, part of the flux of time and change which is forever moving outwards and away from unity.[13]

As has already been intimated, the role that Augustine attributes to signs is central to his understanding of this process.[14] 'All teaching', Augustine writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, 'is about either things or signs'.[15] Signs point to things, and while every sign must itself be a thing (since otherwise it would be nothing), not every thing is a sign: things do not necessarily point forward to other things. Words, 'verbal signs', are among those things that invariably function as signs, indeed this is their only use.

The capacity of signs to teach us about things is not without problems, as is demonstrated when, early on in *De Doctrina*, Augustine appears to make a confident statement about the capacity of signs to guide us: 'things are learned about through signs'.[16] However, his discussion of the relationship between signs and things in fact suggests the opposite, since he starts not with signs but with things. Babcock comments that this ordering of his subject matter suggests that Augustine 'is acutely aware, from the beginning, that signs can be construed wrongly; that they can be given the wrong *terminus*; that they can be arranged in patterns of signification that point away from rather than toward, what he considers the true content, the true meaning, of Scripture'.[17]

The complexity of the process by which signs point forward to further realities is particularly apparent in the case of words, which, as above, invariably function as signs. Words are profoundly ambivalent: they are both indispensable to human beings' attempts to speak and listen to one another and they are also slippery, imprecise and inadequate to their task.

This theme is explored in Augustine's early work, *De Magistro* (c.389). Near the start of the book, Adeodatus confidently asserts that nothing can be made known

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[13] Harrison (1992), 55-6.
[14] Cf. Burnyeat (1999); Jackson (1969); Markus (1996), ch. 3; O'Daly (1987), 171-8.
[15] *doc. chr.* 1.2.2.
[16] *doc. chr.* 1.2.2.
[17] Babcock (1995), 146-7.

without the use of signs.[18] However, in this respect, *De Magistro* effects a somewhat surprising *volte-face*. For, after appearing to establish that indeed 'nothing can be taught without signs',[19] Augustine proceeds to turn the argument on its head: although signs are indispensable for teaching, nonetheless, if we are ignorant of the realities to which a sign refers, we will never be able to understand the sign. As Augustine remarks to Adeodatus,

> ...if we examine the matter more carefully, perhaps you will discover that nothing is learned by means of its signs. For when I am shown a sign, it cannot teach me anything if it finds me ignorant of the reality for which the sign stands; but if it finds me acquainted with the reality, what do I learn from the sign?[20]

It is, the work ultimately concludes, only by the prior illumination that is provided by Christ, the interior teacher, that we are able to understand signs at all. As Augustine later summarises, the argument of the work is precisely that, 'we find that it is God alone who teaches men knowledge...in accord with what is written in the Gospel: "One is your teacher, Christ"'.[21]

A similar view is expressed in Augustine's account of his early attempts at language learning in the *Confessions*. Here, in a passage made famous by Wittgenstein, Augustine recounts that the way in which he learned the meanings of words was when his elders 'called an object by some name, and while saying the word pointed to that thing'.[22] Significantly, however, Augustine prefaces his account of this process by saying that 'it was not that older people taught me by offering me words by way of formal instruction... No, I taught myself, using the mind you gave me, O my God...'[23] As Matthews comments, '...it is God-given intelligence that enables us to learn from ostension, not simply the juxtaposition of sign and object signified. Without that intelligence, the chronic ambiguity of ostension would block learning.'[24] Again, as in *De Magistro*, signs in

---

[18] Cf. *mag.* 3.6.
[19] *mag.* 10.31.
[20] *mag.* 10.33; cf. Burnyeat (1999), 290.
[21] *retr.* 1.12; cf. *mag.* 11.38; 12.40; 14.46.
[22] *conf.* 1.8.13.
[23] *conf.* 1.8.13.
[24] Matthews (2005), 31.

themselves cannot communicate if God does not, in one way or another, grant a prior understanding of what they will mean.

The opacity of language is far from being simply a linguistic issue. Central to the inability of signs to convey the meaning that human beings intend them to are the moral failings of the people who use them. As Markus writes,

> Meaning is not obvious to us; our understanding is clouded. Fallen human beings as we are, we are permanently liable to failing to communicate and failing to be communicated with. In this life we are denied the transparency of mutual understanding which would allow direct communication between us and other minds. Adam's sin has ruptured the primal community in which communication would have been effortless; now, in our sinful state, we need words and other signs. Without communication there can be no community. Our fallen communities are founded on the imperfect medium of language... Although, therefore, the whole purpose of speech is to communicate, it is doomed to be an imperfect vehicle for meaning, always opening up a 'communication gap' between speaker and hearer. The sign always intrudes between them, as it intrudes between themselves and that which they speak about or wish to know about. Hence the radical ambivalence of signs, their ability to conceal no less than to reveal. Meaning has often to be striven, even struggled for.[25]

As Markus indicates, the decisive role of the Fall dictates that Augustine's thoughts about the slipperiness of signs and the opacity of language are not abstract and ahistorical but, rather, fundamentally rooted in his underlying assessment of the human condition in the aftermath of Adam's sin. Words are only as difficult to understand as the people who use them. Harrison comments that Augustine's 'reflections upon language are not simply derived from its relation to the realities it seeks to convey – they are much more profoundly influenced by his theological analysis of the man who utters them, and of man's fall from intuitive contemplation and vision within, to time-bound, successive, spoken words without'.[26] As Augustine says in his exposition of Ps. 118, '[o]ur humbled state of mortality can reasonably be called a night, for the hearts of men

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[25] Markus (1996), 29-30.
[26] Harrison (1992), 57; cf. Holte (1962), ch. XXVII; Rist (1994), 29; Williams (1989), 139. This section draws generally on Harrison (1992), 55 – 64.

and women are hidden from each other; and from the darkness arise innumerable dangerous temptations'.[27]

In a similar vein, commenting on Ps. 41:8, *Deep calls to deep at the sound of your cataracts*,[28] Augustine explains that *abyssus* can be understood in at least two senses, each one implying a very different type of darkness and inscrutability. As applied to *God* – the 'abyss' who calls – the word teaches us that God's judgements are deeper than we can ever understand: 'your judgments are an unfathomable abyss'.[29] By contrast, when applied to a *human being* – the 'abyss' who is called – it denotes the pride-filled confusion of our mortal, fallen condition which makes us opaque to one another, despite our attempts to communicate:

> If 'deep' signifies profundity, surely the human heart is a deep abyss? Could anything be more profound? Human beings can speak, they can be observed as they use their limbs, and heard in speech; but can we ever get to the bottom of a person's thoughts, or see into anyone's heart? Who can grasp what another person is intent upon there within the heart, what are the possibilities, the activity, the purposes of the heart, its will and its refusals?[30]

Augustine's strong sense of the opacity of human hearts to one another is rooted not only in philosophical or theological reflection but in ecclesial and pastoral experience as well. He uses the occasion of his exposition of Ps. 55:6, *All day long they treated my words with loathing... They will take up residence and hide*, to condemn impostors who have wormed their way into the Church.[31] By contrast with, for example, Manichaeism or Donatism, with their strict demarcation 'between the perfect/elect/pure on the one hand and ordinary people on the other', [32] Catholic Christianity is content to leave any final separation until the eschatological future when God will separate the sheep and goats from one another. The price that the preacher must pay for this is that his words will indeed be treated with loathing by a certain unidentifiable section of the

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[27] *en. Ps.* 118.15.8.
[28] *en. Ps.* 41.13: *Abyssus abyssum invocat, in voce cataractarum tuarum.*
[29] Ps. 35:7; cf. *en. Ps.* 41.14; Lawless (1994), 20.
[30] *en. Ps.* 41.13; cf. *ciu.* 19.7; *conf.* 4.14.22; Lawless (1994), 19.
[31] Cf. *en. Ps.* 55.9; on the problem of the *ficti* in the North African church, cf. Brown (1972), 268.
[32] Boulding (2000-4), 3: 266, n. 9; cf. *en. Ps.* 64.2.

congregation. The sound of his words will strike the ears of all who are in the Church, but while some listeners will turn the preacher's signs into saving realities in their own hearts, others will be completely impervious to them. As the preacher looks out over his congregation, it will be virtually impossible for him to determine who are the true and who are the false Christians, although there may, of course, be some giveaway signs, such as intellectual 'curiosity' or the tendency to go to public entertainments.[33]

And, indeed, the same can be said the other way round, for members of the catholic congregation are likewise unable to assess the worthiness or otherwise of the bishop as he preaches and whether he is, for example, doing it out of pure motives or because he is consumed with pride and *ambitio saeculi*:[34] 'How many allege that I speak to you only to win your admiration and acclaim, that this is my purpose when I address you?'[35]

The realities of ministry within the catholic congregation thus provide a daily example of the closure of human hearts to one another and the consequent difficulty of establishing any sort of communication between them:

> Everyone is on the move in this life. During our earthly journey we are wrapped around with flesh, through which our heart cannot be seen. This is why the apostle says, *Pass no judgment prematurely, before the coming of the Lord, for he will light up the dark, hidden places, and reveal the purposes of our hearts, and then there will be commendation from God for each one* (1 Cor. 4:5). Until this comes about we each carry our own heart along in the journey of our bodily life, and every heart is shut against every other.[36]

However, things get even worse. Despite its apparent pessimism, this image of each human person carrying their own heart along with them is perhaps at the optimistic end of Augustine's assessment of this subject, hinting, as it seems to, a sort of Cartesian self-possession. Elsewhere, it is clearer that the alienation that fallen human beings experience not only cut them off from other people but,

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[33] See ch. 3 below.
[34] Cf. *conf.* 10.30.41; O'Donnell (2005), 66-8.
[35] *en. Ps.* 66.10; 141.8.
[36] *en. Ps.* 55.9: *in hac peregrinatione carnalis vitae, quisque cor suum portat, et omne cor omni cordi clausum est.*

even more fundamentally, from themselves. Augustine explores this theme in his exposition of Ps. 39:13, *My heart forsook me*,[37] which he interprets as meaning 'My heart is incapable of knowing itself'.[38] Here, as elsewhere, a case study is Peter in the gospels, whose future actions lie open, needless to say, to God but who nevertheless is an enigma to himself:

> Did Peter comprehend his own heart – really comprehend it with his heart, I mean – when he said to the Lord, 'I will stay with you even to death' (cf Mt 26:35; Lk 22:33)? In his heart there was false presumption, and the real fear that was also in his heart was covered over and out of sight. Consequently, his heart was in no fit state to understand his heart. His heart was ailing and hidden, but to the physician it was plain to see.[39]

Fredriksen comments that 'Augustine's experience of God's opacity within his own history is terrifyingly duplicated in his experience of himself, and thus of everyone: because of the great sin that marks the beginning of history, man can neither know nor control himself'.[40] As Augustine expresses it in the *Confessions*, 'I have become an enigma to myself, and herein lies my sickness'.[41] If human beings are not only unable to see into the hearts of others but, worse still, are unable to know their own hearts, what realistic chance can there be for true communication from heart to heart?

Whilst communication takes place, for fallen human beings, against this somewhat hopeless backdrop, Augustine nevertheless occasionally allows a glimpse of language as it might have been in its original state. For the fractured and uncertain way in which communication takes place after the Fall is far different from God's original intention. Commenting on *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Fyler identifies four successive stages through which language has passed to arrive at its current position.

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[37] *en. Ps.* 39.23: *cor meum dereliquit me.*
[38] *en. Ps.* 39.23: *non est idoneum ad cognoscendum se*; cf. *en. Ps.* 42.7.
[39] *en. Ps.* 39.23, cf. *en. Ps.* 41.13.
[40] Fredriksen (1995), 310-1.
[41] *conf.* 10.33.50; cf. *conf.* 5.2.2.

First of all, in the beginning, there is God's own speech in creating the world. his 'eternal language, in which to utter is the same as to act'.[42] By contrast with the physicality of human speech, Augustine makes it clear that, 'we ought to understand that God did not say, "Let there be light", by a sound brought forth from the lungs, or by the tongue and teeth'.[43] God utters the Word before the creation of the world, issues commands such as 'Let there be light', and assigns names to what he has made. As Fyler puts it, God's language 'establishes the origin and goal of all human discourse, and the standard against which we must measure earthly speech'.[44] In a second linguistic act, Adam gives names to the birds and animals in Eden, names that arise not from the more or less arbitrary conventions[45] that determine how signs are used in this 'region of dissimilarity'[46] but with, as Aquinas puts it, names that 'fit the nature of things named'.[47] In a third stage, Adam hands on speech to his descendants after the Fall, and in the fourth and most depraved stage, language is divided into diverse tongues after Babel. As Fyler writes,

> Babel marks, in effect, a second Fall, in which the dismaying linguistic results of original sin, already evident in Cain's descendants, become hardened further into the division that will last until Judgment Day. Only then will the restored unity promised by Pentecost, the antitype of Babel, be achieved at last.[48]

Fallen human beings live inescapably in the aftermath of Babel, and yet they carry within themselves a residual memory of something different. Commenting on Ps. 32:3, *Sing him a new song, sing skilfully to him*, Augustine imagines for his congregation a new, graced language which reflects what has been lost by the Fall. It is perhaps interesting to note that his model for this perfect language from which we have fallen is not a lifeless Neoplatonic abstraction but the earthy and distinctively North African chant of labourers in the field. The purity of

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[42] Fyler (1988), 71.
[43] *Gn. litt.* 5.19.
[44] Fyler (1988), 71.
[45] Cf. *doc. chr.* 2.4.
[46] Cf. *conf.* 7.10.16; *en. Ps.* 99.5; *Enn.* 1.8.13; Boulding (1997), 173, n. 72; Fyler (1998), 73.
[47] *Summa Theologiae* 1.a. 94,3; cf. Fyler (1988), 73-6.
[48] Fyler (1988), 70; cf. *doc. chr.* 2.4.

God's language is reflected in, to use Boulding's description, 'rustic songs, mountain cries, whoops of joy, shepherds' shouts':[49]

> Do not worry, for he provides you with a technique of singing. Do not go seeking lyrics, as though you could spell out in words anything that will give God pleasure. Sing to him in jubilation. That is what acceptable singing to God means: to sing jubilantly. But what is that? It is to grasp the fact that what is sung in the heart cannot be articulated in words. Think of people who sing at harvest time, or in the vineyard, or at any work that goes with a swing. They begin by caroling their joy in words, but after a while they seem to be so full of gladness that they find words no longer adequate to express it, so they abandon distinct syllables and words, and resort to a single cry of jubilant happiness. Jubilation is a shout of joy; it indicates that the heart is bringing forth what defies speech. To whom, then, is this jubilation more fittingly offered than to God who surpasses all utterance? You cannot speak of him because he transcends our speech; and if you cannot speak of him, yet may not remain silent, what else can you do but cry out in jubilation, so that your heart may tell its joy without words, and the unbounded rush of gladness not be cramped by syllables?[50]

Similarly, in his comments on Ps. 65:2, *Shout with joy to God all the earth*, in a passage clearly aimed at the Donatists, Augustine's words recall some of the issues confronting catechists in *De catechizandis rudibus*. The joyful shout of the Catholic Church is beyond words. The human heart, rather than struggling, as the catechist does, to convert inner words into signs, simply lets forth an inarticulate noise of pure delight. This shout is a far purer, more primal and more God-like form of language than human beings normally speak. Its ability to be understood by the speaker of any language harks back to an earlier stage of linguistic development, prior to the confusion of tongues in the aftermath of Babel:

> Shout with joy to God, all the earth. What does shout with joy suggest? Burst out into a joyful noise, if you cannot find words to express what you feel. Shouting does not necessarily imply words. We hear people rejoicing simply by making a noise, like the sound of a heart labouring to bring forth into its voice its happiness over what it has conceived, something that cannot be put into words. Shout with joy to God, all the earth. No one should be shouting in some exclusive part of it. No, I repeat, let the whole earth shout with joy, let the Church Catholic shout.[51]

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[49] Boulding (2000-4), 1: 401, n. 30.
[50] *en. Ps.* 32.2.8; cf. Brown (1967), 258.
[51] *en. Ps.* 65.2.

Again, in his exposition of Ps. 42:5, *Why are you so sorrowful, O my soul, and why do you disquiet me?*, Augustine imagines the Psalmist contemplating his disquieted soul, full of division and internal conflict, preoccupied by wrestling with carnal impulses and the war in his members. As he does so, however, he begins to hear another language, which is quite distinct from the Babylonian confusion of tongues to which he is accustomed. The type of utterance described here is an advance even on those already quoted from *en. Pss.* 32 and 65, since this language is so pure that not only does it dispense with the medium of signs but it also bypasses the tongue and the ears, speaking directly to the heart, and calling human beings back to the contemplative vision which they have lost:

> Often in our minds we firmly believe, and hold it as certain in faith, that we shall make our way to Abraham's embrace; yet though we believe it, the soul is troubled by the imminence of death owing to its familiarity with the present world. But then it bends its ear to the inner voice of God, and hears within itself the song of reason. In our silence something sounds softly to us from above, reaching not our ears but our minds. Any who hear that music are so disenchanted with material noise that the whole of human life seems to them a confused uproar, which stops them hearing another sound that is delightful, a sound like no other and beyond description. Indeed, whenever someone in a very stressful situation feels battered, he or she addresses the soul: *Why are you so sorrowful, O my soul, and why do you disquiet me?*[52]

The comparison between language before the Fall and language as it is now experienced draws particular attention to two related characteristics of human language, both of which will be cast in a somewhat different light later in this chapter: its reliance upon physical processes and its sequential, time-bound nature.

To take the first of these, it has already been noted that in human speech it is necessary for a speaker's inner word, if it is to find a home in the heart of a listener, to travel out *via* the mouth, the teeth and the lips and get to its destination *via* the listener's ears. Thus, the purity of the inner word is constantly

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[52] *en. Ps.* 42.7.

at the mercy of the unreliable physical organs by which it is transmitted. The tongue seems to be a particular culprit in this respect. Expounding Ps. 38:2. *I said, I will keep guard over my conduct, so that I do not offend with my tongue*. Augustine traces some at least of the problems that we have with language back to a physical origin in the slipperiness of the tongue. Slippery tongues perhaps are inevitably prone to produce slippery, inadequate verbal signs:

> …it is difficult for anyone not to slip up and sin with the tongue. As scripture says, *If anyone has not sinned with his tongue, he is a perfect man.* The moist saliva that surrounds the tongue makes it slippery.[53]

Here, as elsewhere, Augustine seems to evince a certain distaste for the tongue, in and of itself, a small and unimpressive organ, 'we know what tongues are: small pieces of flesh that by moving in our mouths and striking against the palate and the teeth produce the distinct sounds with which we speak'.[54] However, in the topsy-turvy conditions of a fallen world, this unlikely piece of flesh takes on a power incommensurate with its size and significance: 'Death and life are in the hands of the tongue'.[55] This was fatefully demonstrated in the case of Christ, whose persecutors shout 'crucify, crucify!', thus fulfilling the Psalmist's prophecy that 'the tongue of these people is a sharp sword'.[56] The tongue, of course, is the primary tool of the rhetor, and so Augustine's criticism of it may be related to what Harrison describes in her analysis of *De Doctrina Christiana*, as 'the unresolved tensions...within Augustine's own person and mind between his past, but still enduring, educational and intellectual formation, and his present identity as a Christian bishop'.[57]

The tongue, forming syllable after syllable by striking upon the teeth and the palate is, as it were, 'hard-wired' to a sequential, time-bound form of speech, '*littera post litteram, syllaba post syllabam, verbum post verbum*', in which no sooner are things uttered than they fade away. It is this 'tedious processes of

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[53] *en. Ps.* 38.3: *Non enim lingua frustra in udo est, nisi quia facile labitur.*
[54] *en. Ps.* 120.11.
[55] Prov 18:21, quoted in *en. Ps.* 120.11.
[56] *en. Ps.* 56.13. Cf. Hombert (1998), 240: 'la langue, ce petit membre que l'homme ne peut dompter tant qu'il n'a pas recours à Dieu'.
[57] Harrison (2000a), 69.

syllables', which was what was said to hamper the self-expression of the catechist in *De catechizandis rudibus*[58] that so strongly characterises human speech. The song of the reapers at harvest is able to speak so powerfully of God's language because it is without syllables.[59] A similar contrast is made in the *Confessions*:

> ...let them praise you, your angelic peoples above the heavens, who have no need to look up at the vault and learn by reading your word in it; for they behold your face unceasingly and there read without the aid of time-bound syllables the decree of your eternal will.[60]

Syllables will have no place in the language that God will give. For the syllable is particularly emblematic of the fallen state of language and of the human beings who utter it. The syllables we utter with our tongues tick away sequentially, perpetually reminding us of our time-bound and fragmentary existence and the need for our thoughts to be chopped up into pieces if they are ever to be conveyed to others. As Fyler writes,

> Written or spoken, our language is most marked, in Augustine's widely influential analysis, by its temporality. We are separated from ourselves, or from the Truth within ourselves, and this separation appears inevitably in our speech: as Augustine repeatedly stresses, the fact that human speech must occur in time requires that it be the very image of division and mortality, set against the unity and wholeness of the Word.[61]

To summarise what has been said so far, for fallen human beings to speak at all is to be condemned to a tortuous, tedious process of making what is in our hearts clear to others. The resources that we bring to the task – signs, syllables, the tongue, the pen – all have serious shortcomings. The alienation caused by the Fall ensures that, even if what we mean is clear to ourselves – and that is certainly not guaranteed – we are so cut off from others that we can never be certain how they will receive what we say.

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[58] *cat. rud.* 10.15.
[59] *en. Ps.* 32.2.8: *et immensa latitudo gaudiorum metas non habeat syllabarum*. cf. *en. Ps.* 103.4.1.
[60] *conf.* 13.15.18.
[61] Fyler (1988), 78.

It is somewhat ironic that a speaker and writer as prolific as Augustine should be able, at times, to express such deep pessimism about language. This alone suggests that the attitude outlined above is unlikely to be his last word on the subject. The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways in which, despite this pessimism, the practice of preaching, among other things, ultimately generates a more positive view of language and its possibilities.

At the start of his exposition of Ps. 128, Augustine compares the preacher to the sower in Mk. 4:3-9, scattering his seed on good and bad soil alike. Augustine, like Jesus in the parable, concentrates largely upon the different ways in which the seed may fail to bear fruit, and yet among those who represent the good soil, the word is able to germinate and bear fruit. Augustine's approach to preaching will be explored in the remainder of this chapter, within a structure suggested by this passage:

> (1) Let God's word resound for those who want to hear it and those who do not, in season and out of season. (2) It finds a place for itself; it finds a heart where it may be at home; (3) it finds soil where it may germinate and bear a crop.[62]

1. *Sonet verbum Dei*: The word resounds

a. The imperative to speak

As has already been noted, all human attempts at communication are profoundly influenced by the Fall. Thus, any preacher of the word labours to make himself understood against a highly unpromising backdrop. However, despite the difficulties inherent in their task, the preachers must still preach. In his exegesis in *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* of Gen 2:5, *For God had not yet made it rain upon the earth*, Augustine compares the task of preaching with that of agriculture before and after the Fall. Just as, before the Fall, rain was not needed because plants were able to draw water directly from the earth, so it was with the intellect

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[62] *en. Ps.* 128.1: *Sonet verbum Dei volentibus, nolentibus, opportune, importune. Invenit sibi locum, invenit corda ubi requiescat; invenit terram ubi germinet et fructum ferat.*

of human creatures: 'God watered it by an interior spring, speaking to its intellect, so that it did not receive words from the outside as rain from the...clouds'.[63] After the Fall, the situation decisively changes. Now, just as plants need rain because they can no longer draw sufficient water from the earth to survive, so human beings, dried up by sin, must rely upon the rain provided by the clouds (the writings of the prophets and apostles). The communications that the 'clouds' provide are, as the image suggests, transitory and obscure and yet, for all the imperfections, fallen human beings cannot now do without them, until, through the redemptive work of Christ, they come again to draw water internally:

> ...having begun to labour on the earth man had need of rain from the clouds, that is, of instruction from human words, so that he might in this way grow green again from that dryness and again become the green of the field. I wish that it would gladly welcome the rain of truth from these clouds. For on account of it our Lord deigned to assume the cloud of our flesh and poured out most generously the rain of the holy gospel. He promised that, if anyone should drink of his water, he will return to that inner spring so that he does not seek rain externally. For he says, 'There will come to be in him a spring of water springing up unto eternal life.'[64]

Communication has become, after the Fall, an arduous business and as Harrison comments, '[a]gainst this background, Augustine could not but regard the call to preach as a call to descent, to *negotium*, to *labor*, to a wearisome wrestling with words',[65] but it is a necessary labour, one that cannot be shirked. One way or another, the plants need to be watered.

Just as Adam is condemned by God to toil and eat bread by the sweat of his face,[66] so the preacher is condemned to the necessary toil of preaching.[67] To try and avoid this toil would be to fall into even greater sin. Augustine's pastoral experience as reflected in the *Enarrationes* provides him with first-hand experience of Adam's punishment. Preaching, like other forms of work, causes perspiration. In the absence of direct watering from above, the preacher is condemned to labour against natural deficiencies such as the weakness of his

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[63] *Gn. adu. Man.* 4.5; cf. Fyler (1988), 73.
[64] *Gn. adu. Man.* 5.6.
[65] Harrison (1992), 63.
[66] Cf. Gen. 3:19.
[67] Cf. Harrison (1992), 60.

voice,[68] as he sweats away to produce the bread of theological insight through the arduous toil of exegesis.[69] His congregation also participates in Adam's punishment as its members are also condemned (somewhat unfairly in Augustine's view) to standing through long and arduous sermons,[70] typically in very hot weather, sweating along with the preacher, until the stench in the building that they produce becomes almost tangible.[71] And yet, the sweat is necessary: '...if God's word is our bread, let us sweat away at listening to it rather than die of fasting from it'.[72] For the preacher, as for Adam himself, there is no alternative: in a fallen world, nourishment is acquired by sweat.

The necessity for the preacher to undertake the ongoing sweat of his vocation is explored in Augustine's exposition of Ps. 38. Here, as often in the *Enarrationes*, Augustine uses the title of the psalm, *To the end, Idithun's song for David himself*, as a hermeneutical key to unlock its meaning.[73] Idithun, the 'one who leaps across', embodies the imperative to preach despite the difficulties and whatever the cost. As is made clear in verse two of the psalm, *I said, I will keep guard over my conduct, so that I do not offend with my tongue*, Idithun is only too aware of the difficulties inherent in human language, the slipperiness of the tongue and the problems that human beings have with communication: 'the psalmist had said some things he regretted and admitted that some expressions had fallen from his lips that he wished to recall, but could not'.[74] Moreover, in what appears to be an echo of Augustine's attitude to his own pastoral ministry,[75] Idithun is a natural contemplative, to whom the uninterrupted enjoyment of

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[68] Cf. *en. Ps.* 50.1; On Augustine's weak chest, cf. Boulding (2000-4) 2:410, n.2.
[69] Cf. *en. Ps.* 41.13; 48.2.10; 93.30.
[70] Cf. *cat. rud.* 13.19.
[71] Cf. *en. Ps.* 72.34; McCarthy, 28.
[72] *en. Ps.* 32.3.1: *Proinde si panis noster est uerbum Dei, sudemus in audiendo.*
[73] Idithun (Jeduthun) was a Levitical singer in the time of David (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1-6). The use of his name in the title of psalms is thought to denote a psalm tone to which the words would be sung; cf. Barnes (1992).
Augustine often uses the title of a psalm to unlock its meaning. In his view, the title is like an inscription on the front of a house that will 'save us from taking the wrong turning inside' (*en. Ps.* 53.1); 'every title found in the divine scriptures offers a hint to alert minds' (*en. Ps.* 44.1, cf. 55.1; 80.2). On Augustine's use of the Psalm titles, see Cameron (1999), 292; Fiedrowicz (2000), 21.
[74] *en. Ps.* 38.3.
[75] Cf. for example, *en. Ps.* 118.24.3; Boulding (2000-4) 2: 173, n.17.

God's presence comes more naturally than does the wearisome business of preaching and pastoral interaction.

Idithun's instinctive solution to the constant demands of the carnally-minded people who surround him is to be silent. This, he believes, will be the surest remedy against the failures inherent in human speech: both his own inability to say what he wishes to say and the possibility that what he does say may be misconstrued by his listeners.[76] Commenting on verse three of the psalm, *I have become deaf, and have been humbled, and have fallen silent even from good words*, Augustine explains,

> This leaping speaker has encountered a difficulty in the place to which he has now leapt, and he is looking for some way to leap out of it, to escape this difficulty. 'I was so afraid of committing sin that I imposed silence on myself...'[77]

Idithun's self-imposed silence turns out, however, to be a false answer to the problems that he experiences. Locked up in his own subjectivity, he forgets his primary vocation to be a leaper, a channel of communication between God and his people, appointed by the master of the household to give rations to his fellow-servants.[78]

> The psalmist has suffered a sad and irksome fate, and by confessing it here is warning us to avoid it, not imitate it. As I have said, in his exaggerated fear of saying something that might not be good, he decided to say nothing, not even good things; and because he resolved to keep quiet, he began to lose his hearing. If you are a leaper, you stand and wait to hear from God what you are to say to your fellow men and women. You leap between our rich God and the needy people who look to you, so that you may hear in one quarter and speak in the other.[79]

Ironically, Idithun's decision not to communicate God's word ultimately results in a failure of the contemplative life that he had initially regarded as a safe refuge from his pastoral turmoils. He retreats from communication to contemplation but discovers that, in the absence of communication, contemplation itself is no

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[76] Cf. Jn. 16: 12: 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.'
[77] *en. Ps.* 38.4.
[78] Cf. Mt. 24:45.
[79] *en. Ps.* 38.4.

longer possible for him. Elsewhere in the *Enarrationes*, Augustine expresses the insight that in order to teach, the preacher first needs to listen to God; indeed, the sermon is a corporate act of listening: 'we are indeed all listening to Christ. We all learn from him, and in his school all of us together are students'.[80] In relation to Idithun, however, the insight works in reverse. Once Idithun stops speaking, he finds himself unable to listen:

> But if you choose not to speak on one side, you will not deserve to hear on the other: you are scorning the poor, so you will be scorned yourself by God, who is rich.[81]

The imperative to speak means that his resolution to stay silent is an occasion not, as he had hoped, of calm and recollection but of intense discomfort: 'my pain has come back' – *renovatus est dolor meus*. Verse four of the psalm, *Fire will blaze up during my meditation*,[82] describes the unpleasant outcome of Idithun's silence. Not only has he stopped being able to hear God during his meditation but, like the prophet Jeremiah,[83] his silence results in a painful interior fire. He thus finds himself in a difficult dilemma:

> The psalmist finds himself caught in this vacillation between speaking and keeping silence, between those who are poised to censure him and those who long to receive instruction, between those who have plenty and those in need... Whichever way he turns he is hard pressed, in danger of casting his pearls before swine and equally endangered if he does not dispense their rations to his fellow-servants.[84]

Idithun prays, *Make known to me my end, show me the goal still far away*.[85] He is not only leaping between God and human beings but also 'straining to what lies ahead'.[86] His knowledge of his ultimate destination enables him to fulfil his present vocation, which is to keep on sowing the seed of God's word, despite the setbacks and difficulties.

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[80] *en. Ps.* 34.1.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 49.14, 23; 50.13; 57.7-10; 66.10; 98.1; 126.3.
[81] *en. Ps.* 38.4.
[82] *en. Ps.* 38.5: *in meditatione mea exardescet ignis.*
[83] Cf. Jer. 20:9.
[84] *en. Ps.* 38.5.
[85] *en. Ps.* 38.5.
[86] Phil. 3:12-14; cf. *en. Ps.* 38.6.

Augustine's depiction of the travails of Idithun echoes his exposition of Ps. 54:8,[87] *Who will give me wings, as though to a dove? Then I will fly away and find rest. Lo, I fled away and stayed in the desert.* For here again Augustine hears in the psalms the pastor's wish to withdraw from the multitudes of people who pester him and to seek refuge either in the desert, or in the solitude of his own soul. The former is impossible, since multitudes can gather in the desert[88] and the latter is intensely problematic: 'charity itself disturbs him there. He is alone in his soul but not alone as far as charity is concerned.'[89] Like Idithun, the Psalmist here must remain with his people, discharging his pastoral duties. in particular the duty to preach: 'stay here, talk to them, exhort them, be kind to them, threaten them, bring them to a better mind'.[90] Thus, despite the anguish that pastoral ministry always brings and, particularly in this context, despite the difficulties and sweat of language, the pastor must resist the impetus to withdraw to the supposed safety of his own enclosed subjectivity. He must remain engaged with the messy and compromised business of pastoral ministry, and the arduous business of preaching in a way that that will enable the signs, however imperfectly, to point his congregation towards God.

Commenting on Ps. 118:15, Augustine discusses how the Church is called to a certain type of garrulousness: 'I will chatter about your commandments and consider your ways'.[91] The talkativeness that he particularly has in mind in this context is that of the 'long winded disputations of learned men against all the enemies of the Christian and Catholic faith'.[92] However, it seems likely that Augustine would have agreed that preachers, called to expound as well as to than defend the faith, are also called to chatter.

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[87] This will be discussed in more detail in ch. 3.
[88] Cf. *conf.* 8.6.14-15.
[89] *en. Ps.* 54.10.
[90] *en. Ps.* 54.8: *adesto, loquere, exhortare, blandire, minare, corripe.*
[91] *In mandatis tuis garriam et considerabo vias tuas.*
[92] *en. Ps.* 118.6.4: *aduersus omnes inimicos fidei christianae atque catholicae copiosis doctorum disputationibus garrula.*

b. Teaching and lying

The exposition of Ps. 38 seems to draw attention to two particular characteristics of Augustine's thought in relation to communication. The first is his stress on the importance of teaching. Near the beginning of *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine expresses what appears to be the central lesson that was learned in the passage on Idithun that has just been discussed:

> Every kind of thing, you see, which does not decrease when it is given away, is not yet possessed as it ought to be, while it is held on to without also being given to others. Now he said himself, *whoever has shall be given more* (Mk 4:25). So he will give to those who have; that is, for those who make generous use of what they have received he will complete what he has given and heap even more upon them.[93]

A comparison is made here between the task of teaching, and Jesus's feeding of the crowds.[94] Human beings are condemned to sweat for their bread, but Christ demonstrates that this same bread can increase massively in quantity when it is broken and shared. Similarly, the preacher sweats over the words of a sermon but, as he contemplates the task ahead of him, he will be able to echo Augustine's belief as he approaches *De Doctrina*, that 'all the things the Lord has already granted me for setting about this work will be multiplied under his inspiration, when I start passing them on to others'.[95]

Augustine's emphasis on the importance of teaching is thus central to his understanding of the preacher's role. It informs the popular level at which his *sermones ad plebem* are characteristically pitched, his consistent quest for clarity and intelligibility in preaching,[96] his preference for vulgar and colloquial forms of speech when he believes that these, rather than terms approved by grammarians, will best convey his meaning: 'better that linguistic experts should find fault with us than that people should not understand'.[97] Such concerns are characteristic of his attitude from an early stage. Indeed, the purpose of his application to Bishop Valerius for study leave soon after ordination was not

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[93] *doc. chr.* 1.1.1; cf. *cat. rud.* 1.2.
[94] Cf. Mk. 6:34-44; 8:1-9.
[95] *doc. chr.* 1.1.1.
[96] Cf. *doc. chr.* 4.8.22; 4.10.24.
[97] *en. Ps.* 138.20; cf. 36.3.6; *doc. chr.* 2.15.22; 3.3.7; 4.10.24.

simply for time to study the Scriptures, with which he was already quite well acquainted. Rather, as he expresses it in his letter, the primary focus of the study leave is pedagogical: Augustine believes that what he primarily needs to acquire is 'what I lack in order to minister to the salvation of others; "not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:33)'.[98] As Markus writes, '[f]rom the very start of his clerical career, what exercised Augustine's mind was not so much the question how the biblical text was to be understood, but how it was to be expounded in the believing community'.[99]

In his practice of preaching, as it develops, Brown comments that Augustine's ability to excite a congregation with his words outflanks Pelagius's austere insistence on the autonomy of the conscious mind – a theme that will be explored below – and yet his ability to evoke such reactions should not blind us to his perception of the preacher's primary role: '[i]t was not to stir up emotion; it was to distribute food'.[100] Brown quotes a letter to Jerome: 'If I do gain any stock of knowledge (in the Scriptures) I pay it out immediately to the people of God'. [101] Similarly, Harrison argues that, by contrast with the importance placed by classical rhetoric on delight and persuasion, for Augustine, 'the first and determining aim, the ultimate goal of the Christian preacher, is to teach'.[102]

The priority of teaching, of the preacher's work in constantly paying out to others what he himself has received, begins to shed a somewhat different light on some of the themes explored earlier. On the one hand, as was seen in the earlier discussion, the 'inner word' does indeed have a purity and coherence that is lost when it is embodied in the unsatisfactory signs which fallen human beings have at their disposal in trying to make themselves understood. Yet, on the other hand, the option simply does not exist for Idithun, for the Christian preacher or, indeed, for anyone else, simply to remain locked into the purity of the inner word. The inner word may indeed be purer than that which is spoken aloud but its purity cannot be preserved by trying to safeguard or hoard it. Rather, it needs

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[98] *ep.* 21,4 (390-1), quoted in Markus (1996), 14.
[99] Markus (1996), 14.
[100] Brown (1967), 252.
[101] *ep.* 73.2.5, quoted in Brown (1967), 252.
[102] Harrison (2000b), 220.

to find faithful, albeit imperfect, expression in the messy and compromised world of communal and ecclesial life.

The point can be further emphasised by comparing preaching with lying. As was noted earlier, the preacher must, before delivering his word, hear first what Christ has to say. By contrast, for Augustine, lying is 'the archetypal private utterance':[103] 'anyone who lies...speaks from his own store'.[104] As Williams writes,

> ...truth is common property, one's own opinion is not really one's own at all if it is true; it is the common property of all right-thinking people, and no one has any individual stake in it: 'No one should regard anything as his own, except perhaps a lie, since all truth is from him who says, "I am the truth" (*doc. chr.* Proœm 8).'[105]

The understanding of lying as a private utterance, characteristic of the private wills of those who inhabit the earthly city, is one that forms part of Augustine's polemic against the Donatists. Donatists embody the liar's self-enclosure, the antithesis of the preacher's open exposure of the truth. Commenting on Ps. 57:4, *Sinners have been alienated even from the womb, they have spoken falsehoods*, he concludes that it is not so much that false speaking separates people from the Church but, rather, that once cut off from the Church, people become incapable of truthful speech: 'it is inevitable that anyone who breaks out of the Church's womb should speak falsehoods.'[106] The conclusion is that once cut off from the body of Christ, who is Truth itself, and existing in a private enclosure, cut off from the universality of the Catholic Church, Donatists inevitably lie.

In a succession of phrases in Ps. 39:10-11, the Psalmist records his determination to speak the word of God openly: *I have freely proclaimed your righteousness in the great Church. See, Lord, I will not keep my lips sealed, you know it. I have not hidden my justice in my heart. I have declared your truth and your salvation. I have not concealed your mercy and your justice from the great congregation.*

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[103] Markus (1996), 132, n. 17.
[104] *en. Ps.* 38.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 91.6; 102.4; 115.3; *ciu.* 15.3; *conf.* 12.25.34; *Gn. adu. Man.* 16.24.
[105] Williams (2001), 66.
[106] *en. Ps.* 57.6 cf. *en. Ps.* 36.2.18.

By contrast with those, like the Donatists, whose truth is private, the martyrs are able to take their cue from the Psalmist in speaking publicly, venturing their lives in open confession of the truth to their persecutors:

> In the Catholic Church, scorning all pretence, bonded closely to one another, they confessed Christ. They were his members, and they longed to follow where their Head had gone before. And who were the people possessed by such longing? People brave under torture, faithful in their confession, truthful in speech.[107]

The fact that Truth is, by its very nature, catholic, shared, publicly owned, 'not mine nor his, but it belongs to all of us, whom [God]...call[s] to share it in communion with him',[108] adds a further encouragement to preachers to share with others what they themselves have been given. Preachers are called to take things up where the martyrs have left off.

The preacher, conscious of the purity of the inner word that he knows in his heart, may indeed be reluctant to release it into the uncertainties of the fallen world, clothed in the uncertain garments of humanly-instituted signs. But this is precisely what he is called to do, and, if he is over-scrupulous on this point, he will start to look very much like a liar or a Donatist, proud and self-enclosed; clinging to a private, individual version of the truth. Human speech processes may indeed be tainted by sin, but it would be more sinful still not to avail oneself of the opportunities they offer.

c. Words and the Incarnation

God's eternal generation of the Word has some similarities with the process of human speech. When God begets his Word, he remains God. Likewise, when, according to Augustine, human beings speak, they too utter a word that is not changed when they utter it but remains with them:

> It is something like when we talk; in order for what we have in mind to reach the mind of our hearers through the ears of their flesh, the word which we have in our thoughts becomes a sound,

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[107] *en. Ps.* 39.16; cf. 115.3-4.
[108] *conf.* 12.25.34: *veritas tua nec mea est nec illius aut illius, sed omnium nostrum quos ad eius communionem publice vocas.*

and is called speech. And yet this does not mean that our thought is turned into that sound, but while remaining undiminished in itself, it takes on the form of a spoken utterance by which to insert itself into their ears, without bearing the stigma of any change in itself. That is how the Word of God was not changed in the least, and yet became flesh, in order to dwell amongst us.[109]

However, it remains the case that there is an enormous difference between the eternal Word that God utters and the transitory words spoken by fallen human beings, using the sequential, time-bound, syllabic process of communication that they have at their disposal.

Two passages from the *Enarrationes* serve to highlight, in terms that are now quite familiar, the apparent hopelessness of human language in its fallen, ungraced condition and the enormous, seemingly unbridgeable ontological gap between God and human beings, his speech and their speech. In the first of these, commenting on Ps. 44:2, *I tell my works to the king*, Augustine explains the difference between the way in which God speaks and the way that human beings speak:

...from where does God bring forth a Word, if not from his heart, from his innermost being? Any word you speak yourself you bring forth from your heart; there is no other source for the word that sounds audibly and then fades away. Are you surprised that the same should be true for God? But there is a difference: God's speaking is eternal. You say something now, because you were silent a moment ago. Or perhaps you do not yet speak your word, you hold it back. When you do begin to bring it out you are breaking your silence and giving birth to a word that did not previously exist. Not in this manner did God generate his Word, for God's speaking has no beginning and no end; yet he speaks one Word only. He could speak another only if what he had spoken could pass away; but as he by whom the Word is spoken abides eternally, so too does the Word he speaks abide. This Word is spoken once, and never ceases to be spoken; nor had the speaking of it any beginning; nor is it spoken twice, for what is spoken once never passes away.[110]

In a second passage, again drawn from Augustine's exposition of Ps. 38, in his comments on verse 5, *Make known to me the number of my days, the number that is*, he reflects on what Boulding describes as 'the contrast between the elusive

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[109] *doc. chr.* 1.12.12.
[110] *en. Ps.* 44.5.

quality of our time, characteristic of creaturely existence which is close to non-being, and the eternity of God, whose Word has neither beginning nor ending'.[111]

What are you going to give me, then, of this present hour? How much of it will you give me – enough for me to speak the word, 'is'? When you say the word 'is' you utter one syllable, and that only takes a moment. But this syllable has three letters, and even in that tiny moment you will not reach the second letter of the word until the first has ended, nor will the third make itself heard until the second has died away. What can you give me, then, of this one syllable? And do you think you can hold onto a day, if you cannot hold onto a syllable? As the moments fly past all things are snatched away. The torrent of things flows on, but from this torrent he drank for us on his way, he who has now lifted up his head.[112]

The final line of this passage casts new light on the problem. The Christian belief that the eternal Word himself drank from the torrent of creaturely, time-bound existence makes a dramatic difference to the way that such existence and the modes of speech so closely associated with it can be viewed. If God's original uttering of the eternal Word primarily serves to remind us of the distance between his eternity and human contingency, the Incarnation of that same Word decisively establishes a link between these two realities. Moreover, the entry of the eternal Word into the mutable and contingent reality of human life and human language serves to underwrite human attempts at signification, ensuring that they are not ultimately destined to be entirely hopeless. As Jordan writes,

We would not be able to approach God 'but that Wisdom Himself deigned to make Himself congruous even with an infirmity as is ours... Although he is our homeland, He made Himself also the way to the homeland (*doc. chr.* 1.11.11)'. God's having made of Himself the way is to be taken as the primordial source of signification – the general principle under which all other signs are classed. God's having made himself accessible enables other signs to function as signs. For men, wayfarers within the primordial hierarchy, expressive signs are to explain and be explained by the mediating infleshing of God's Word.[113]

The Incarnation thus encourages a more optimistic assessment of the potential of human linguistic processes. It encourages fallen human beings to believe that, whatever the difficulties they might experience in making themselves

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[111] Boulding (2000-4) 2: 177, n. 30.
[112] *en. Ps.* 38.7, cf. 76.8.
[113] Jordan (1980), 186-7.

understood, the essential link between a speaker's pre-conceived inner word and the outer word which he actually speaks can be maintained. Likewise. the Incarnation sheds new light on the fact that, as noted above, human speech always relies on physical processes and, in particular, the workings of the tongue and the ears. The Incarnation affirms that ultimately, fleshly human processes will be equal to the task of carrying out the process of signification, however imperfectly, since these very physical processes have been dignified by Christ. In his exposition of Ps. 109, *The Lord said to my Lord...*, Augustine reflects on the fact that, because 'Christ took flesh,...died in the flesh, rose in the flesh, and in that same flesh ascended into heaven and sits at the Father's right hand', he can truly be called both David's son and David's Lord.[114]

To summarise what has been said so far in this section, the preacher, despite all the difficulties inherent in human speech, is called upon to be, like Idithun, a leaper between God and man, conveying God's words to his people, rather than being locked up in a false solitude that may appear to promise peace and contemplation but which cannot truly deliver these things. The public and open nature of the truth calls the preacher to prioritise teaching in his discourse, perpetually giving out what he has received, by contrast with the liar's tendency to a self-enclosed hoarding of private 'truths'. What is more, although the preacher's attempts at communication will always be unsatisfactory, marked by the time-bound and physical characteristics of all human speech, nonetheless they are underwritten by Christ's own entry into the time-bound and physical order which demonstrates that the word can indeed go forth and be physically embodied without being essentially changed.

It remains to be emphasised that love underlies every aspect of this process, something that can clearly be seen by returning to *De catechizandis rudibus*.[115] God's love in the Incarnation might be described as having both an outgoing aspect (Christ does not cling to equality with God but empties himself) and also an indwelling one (Christ takes the form of a servant and is found in human

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[114] *en. Ps.* 109.7.
[115] The discussion below draws on Louth (1989).

form).[116] In the first place, Augustine encourages catechists to take Christ's *outgoing* action as their pattern: whilst retaining the fuller apprehension of the truth in his heart, the catechist should move outwards, through love, towards his pupil. Christ's bridging of the enormous gap between God and humanity in the Incarnation guarantees that the relatively small gap between the catechist's inner and his outer word is one that he will be able to cross:

> For however much our articulate speech may differ from the vivacity of our intelligence, much greater is the difference of the flesh of mortality from the equality of God. And, nevertheless, *although He was in the same form, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant*...What is the explanation of this but that He made Himself *weak to the weak, in order that He might gain the weak*?[117]

Moreover, the catechist should also model his practice on the *indwelling* aspect of the Incarnation in which Christ takes human form. For catechists' (or preachers') commitment to the priority of teaching and preaching expresses their love for their pupils and their desire for communion with them, similar to that of Christ for humanity. Augustine knows that the task of catechesis can often be wearisome but he comments that, if this is the case,

> ...we should draw close to these small children with a brother's love, or a father's or a mother's, and as a result of our empathy with them, the oft-repeated phrases will sound new to us also. For this feeling of compassion is so strong that, when our listeners are touched by us as we speak and we are touched by them as they learn, each of us comes to dwell in the other, and so they as it were speak in us what they hear, while we in some way learn in them what we teach.[118]

As Augustine implies, the process goes in both directions. Love underlies the catechist's ability to indwell his pupil or the preacher's to indwell his audience and love also opens the ears of those who, within the mixed body of the Church, are capable of receiving the message the preacher delivers: 'charity believes without stint, at least among those who are bonded together by charity...all whose ears are open to me by love will believe me'.[119] Thus, the difficulties that human

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[116] Cf. Phil. 2:6-11.
[117] *cat. rud.* 10.15.
[118] *cat. rud.* 12.17.
[119] *conf.* 10.3.3, cf. Sutherland (1990), 148.

beings experience with language, while these never disappear, are capable of being overcome by love. As Louth comments,

> Love effects that presence one to another that has been sundered by the Fall and is only equivocally bridged by language. And yet it is language that expresses that love and makes possible the communication that language seeks to effect. The notion of knowledge by presence, in contrast with which communication by signs seemed so inevitably inadequate, is restored by his understanding of the effect of love. Love produces a presence of the one to the other so that we are both present to that which the speaker knows, and the hearer can thus know too.[120]

2. ...*invenit sibi locum*: The word finds a place for itself

a. Creating a linguistic community

Writing in his *Retractationes*, Augustine recounts how, shortly after his conversion, 'I composed a book called *The Teacher* where, after some discussion and inquiry, we find that it is God alone who teaches men knowledge, all of which is also in accord with what is written in the Gospel: "One is your teacher, Christ"'.[121] As has already been discussed, in *De Magistro*, Augustine and his son Adeodatus discuss the nature of verbal signs.[122] Their conversation initially affirms the importance of signs in all learning but Augustine finally concludes that 'the value of words, to state the most that can be said for them, consists in that they bid us look for things. These they do not display for our knowledge'.[123] Signs do indeed have a function in pointing to things but they are, as Rist comments, 'a necessary but not sufficient condition of learning'.[124] Only those who have an initial knowledge of the things to which they point will be able to understand the signs. As Dubois puts it, '[a]ll understanding presupposes a previous affinity with the reality under discussion'.[125]

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[120] Louth (1989), 156.
[121] *retr.* 1.12. On *de Magistro*, cf. Kirwan (1989), ch. 3; Kirwan (2001); Markus (1996), 79-85; Matthews (2005), ch. 4.
[122] On dialectic as an 'educational technique', see Lienhard (1996), 19-22.
[123] *mag.* 11.36.
[124] Rist (1994), 32.
[125] Dubois (1989), 165.

If, in order for learning to take place, prior understanding is necessary, then it becomes vital for the preacher who has teaching as his primary aim, to know how his congregation can acquire such understanding. On one level, as will be discussed below, *De Magistro* is clear that it is only Christ who can create it: 'He it is who teaches us, namely Christ, that is to say "the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting Wisdom"'.[126] However, in a more immediate sense, a congregation's ability to understand Old Testament passages, such as the words of the Psalms, comes from intense familiarity with the Scriptures and particularly with the New Testament. As Fiedrowicz writes:

> Augustine's interpretation of the scriptural words he treats as signs presupposes a prior understanding, an already known horizon... He was fully persuaded that a sign (*signum*) could be understood only by someone who already had at his disposal a certain knowledge of the reality (*res*) to which the sign pointed. Otherwise the sign would remain unintelligible. Thus the Church's faith, unfolding from the New Testament, forms the necessary prior understanding for correct interpretation of the symbolic words of the Old Testament.[127]

At a basic level, then, the preacher's job must also be to teach members of his congregation to speak a language. Augustine's objective in preaching appears to be to weave a backdrop of 'previous affinity' with the realities under discussion in the memories of members of his congregation, so that when they hear the scriptural texts, they do not do so in a vacuum but rather can situate them and place them in their proper context. It is only when such a backdrop exists that the signs that members of his congregation encounter as the Scriptures are read will truly be able to speak of the realities they seek to convey. Brown describes Augustine's preaching in these words:

> In one sermon, he could move through the whole Bible, from Paul to Genesis and back again, *via* the Psalms, piling half-verse on half-verse. This method of exegesis indeed, which involved creating a whole structure of verbal echoes, linking every part of the Bible, was particularly well-suited to teaching this hitherto quite unknown text, to an audience used to memorizing by ear.[128]

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[126] *mag.* 11.38.
[127] Fiedrowicz (2000), 25.
[128] Brown (1967), 254.

Like the teaching of any language, the training that Augustine gives his congregation is a laborious business, necessitating patience and frequent repetition: 'we make sure that it is not forgotten even by those unwilling or unable to read; let us serve as a book for them'.[129] However, it is often evident that such training has its rewards. At various points in the *Enarrationes*, Augustine records members of his congregation bearing witness to their prior understanding of what he is saying, as they shout out in recognition of what has been said or anticipate a point that will be made.[130] On one occasion, accustomed to 'being rained on by the clouds', members of the congregation enthusiastically anticipate a comparison that Augustine is about to make between the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church and the marriage of Samson to the Philistine Delilah.[131] They leap for joy as they recognise that the preacher is about to talk about the heavenly Jerusalem.[132] Augustine himself regularly pays tribute to his congregation's ability to understand the scriptural signs: 'you are no strangers to the distinctive flavour of the scriptures, as the world is; you have heard these things often.'[133] His audience's prior knowledge of the subjects under discussion makes them capable themselves of contributing to his preaching, able to 'supplement from... [their] own intelligence the shortcomings of my explanation'.[134] The preacher is not therefore condemned to a constant catechesis of the uninstructed, since, within a community that is used to hearing the Bible expounded, previous sermons create a context of knowledge and understanding which informs its members as they meet the challenge of new passages, enabling them to grow and progress[135] as a shared world of meaning is created:

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[129] *en. Ps.* 121.8.

[130] cf. Van der Meer (1961), 427, who argues that, owing to the efforts of his *notarii*, 'much light and shade has naturally disappeared' from Augustine's sermons, indicating that there would have been many occasions of Augustine reacting to congregational response which have disappeared from the text that we now have. Lawless seems rather more optimistic: '[w]e possess them [Augustine's sermons] today in a form which reflects as closely as is humanly possible their original delivery, the *sermo cottidianus* of everyday speech. The fact that Augustine was prevented by death from polishing the sermons or revising them, as he had planned, adds to, rather than subtracts from, their intimate and lively rapport with his listeners' (Lawless [1994], 23). On the work of the *notarius*, see Lancel (2002), 214-6.

[131] *en. Ps.* 88.1.10.

[132] *en. Ps.* 147.15.

[133] *en. Ps.* 59.1.

[134] *en. Ps.* 58.2.3.

[135] cf. *en. Ps.* 131.1, *crescendum et proficiendum*. Ch. 4 will explore further Augustine's concepts of growth and progress in the *Enarrationes*.

You are not like uninstructed people (*non tanquam rudes)* who need to have everything explained. You must help us to some extent by remembering what you heard in earlier sermons, so that we need not repeat it all as though it were all new to you.[136]

Augustine's preaching in the *Enarrationes* might be said to have two related effects: pedagogical and social.[137] In pedagogical terms, as has been argued, sermons enable members of the congregation to understand signs that would otherwise be obscure to them, so that new signs can be understood and appropriated against the backdrop of prior understanding. In social terms, preaching has an effect as members of the congregation who are slowly learning the meaning of signs, find themselves built up as a community which speaks a common language:

What we search for...is an understanding of the opaque sign which will both disclose its meaning and enable us to communicate with others. The search for meaning is a quest for transcendence – transcendence of the self imprisoned among opaque signs, isolated from the linguistic community no less than from the realm of meanings accessible to it. In discovering the meaning of signs we discover a shared world of reference and in so doing we are integrated into our linguistic community. The two things are, at bottom, identical: integration in the linguistic community *is* discovery of meaning, and the search for meaning heals ruptures in the linguistic community. Discovery of meaning frees us from captivity to the sign, and incorporates us in what we might call a textual or an interpretative community'.[138]

The role of preaching in forming a community is particularly important because, as has already been discussed, human beings' alienation from one another and the breakdown of communication that has occurred between them are, for Augustine, one of the primary results of original sin. The work of preaching and listening to sermons, though necessarily arduous as is all work in the aftermath of the Fall, can, to some extent, work to counteract some of the Fall's most serious effects. Those who have gained familiarity with a set of commonly shared signs experience improved communication among themselves, the partial bridging of

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[136] *en. Ps.* 131.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 136.1.
[137] This section draws on Markus (1996), 31-8.
[138] Markus (1996), 30-31; cf. Rist (1994), 35-6.

the communication gap that so strongly characterises human language as it is currently experienced. As Markus writes,

> Speech is the very condition of rational association, the 'interpreter' between minds which, without it, would remain opaque to each other; and the written text... is the means whereby the absent can be drawn into the group communicating by means of speech.[139]

In view of these things, it is surprising that Markus should argue in another essay, written at an earlier date, but published in the same volume that,

> ...for a man of his insight, [Augustine is] astonishingly blind to the extent that communities are created by the language they speak quite as much as they create it: that communities arise where patterns of response are shared, and that possession of a common language at once fosters and is made possible by such sharing of response-patterns.[140]

In fact, it seems evident that whenever Augustine preaches, not only is he forming a community by means of a common language, but he is doing so consciously and intentionally.

b. Love and the linguistic community

However, here there needs to be a word of caution. For, although increased communication may appear to reverse some of the effects of the Fall, it cannot always be greeted as an unqualified good. Here, Augustine's comments on Ps. 54:10, *Engulf them, Lord, and confuse their languages*, where he analyses the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, are significant:

> Until that time there had been only one tongue; and one tongue was expedient for people who were of one mind, one single language was right for humble people. But when that unanimity degenerated into a conspiracy of pride, God dealt mercifully with them by estranging their tongues, to make it impossible for them to form a dangerous unity by understanding each other. Through proud persons human languages were diversified and through the humble apostles languages were harmonized; the spirit of pride fragmented language, and the Holy Spirit gathered dispersed languages into one.[141]

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[139] Markus (1996), 32.
[140] Markus (1996), 93.
[141] *en. Ps.* 54.11; cf. *doc. chr.* 2.4.5-2.5.6; Louth (1989), 153-4.

In this passage, the diversity of languages that occurs at Babel, and the consequent loss of comprehension that human beings experience, is described not so much a symptom of the Fall, as itself a work of God's mercy. As Rist writes, 'the Tower of Babel – the plurality of languages – is a sign of the sin of pride, but paradoxically it is also a difficulty in the path of would-be tyrants'.[142] Augustine suggests that if human beings, with their proud wills unchecked, were able to communicate effectively with one another, terrible horrors would be certain to ensue from the unity that they would form with one another.[143] Thus, for all that the ruptured state of human communication is a result of the Fall, more effective communication does not necessarily provide any remedy for it and it may, indeed, make things worse.

Thus, the ability of a shared language to form its users into a community is one that Augustine often views very negatively. Commenting on Ps. 64:4, *The words of sinners had power over us*, Augustine explains how, for good or ill, the language spoken by any society to which a human being might belong will inevitably shape their identity:

> Since we were born on this earth, we invariably fell in with bad people, and we listened as they talked... Every human being, wherever he or she is born, learns the tongue of that country, or district or civic community, and is imbued with the customs and way of life proper to the place (*omnis homo ubicumque nascitur, ipsius terrae, uel regionis, uel civitatis linguam discit; illius imbuitur moribus et uita*). How, for instance, could a child born among pagans avoid paying cult to a stone idol, when his parents have trained him in that form of worship? In that *milieu* he heard his earliest words; he sucked in that falsehood with his mother's milk. And since those who spoke about such things were adults, and he but a child when he was learning to speak, what could the little one do, except be guided by the authority of his elders, and take it for granted that what they recommended was good for him?[144]

All manner of groups are able, by means of a shared language, to incorporate people into themselves, with very varying effects. To take one example,

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[142] Rist (1994), 36; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 6.10.
[143] Examples that come to mind are perhaps the role of the internet in the events of 11 September, 2001, or car bombers using their mobile phones to alert each other to the approach of targets.
[144] *en. Ps.* 64.6.

Augustine explains in *City of God* that, 'the Imperial City has imposed on subject nations not only her yoke but also her language, as a bond of peace and society'.[145] The increased opportunity for association between people that the empire has brought about by its imposition of a shared language is distinctly ambivalent. It has, in Augustine's view, had a variety of benefits but in order to bring these about, many wars and much slaughter have been necessary. Indeed, even once a shared society and a common language have been established, fear, violence and division are still apparent throughout the empire. An even more negative example of the ability of shared language to incorporate those who speak it into a community is provided in book two of *De Doctrina Christiana*[146] where, as Markus argues, Augustine sees the sharing of a symbolic system (primarily a common language) as being able to unite human beings with demons in a common social order.[147]

The fact that communities are able to bind their members together into unity by means of a shared language cannot therefore be straightforwardly applauded. On the one hand, the life of such a community, with its increased possibilities for communication, will counteract some effects of the alienation between human beings that takes place as a result of the Fall. But, on the other, the aims and intentions of such communities may be so misguided that it would have been better if they had never been formed in the first place. Because such communities bring their individual pride-filled members together and enable them to hatch conspiracies of pride,[148] it would often be preferable for them to have suffered from the mutual confusion of Babel. What is it, then, that distinguishes the linguistic community which is the Church from, to use the examples already given, the linguistic community that is the Roman empire or that which is formed when people associate with demons or magicians?

The fundamental difference is the Church's commitment to the love of God and neighbour[149] which ensures that the language the Church speaks is not, as are the

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[145] *ciu.* 19.7.
[146] Cf. *doc. chr.* 2.24.37.
[147] Cf. Markus (1996), 31-3; 132-9; Babcock (1995), 151.
[148] Cf. *en. Ps.* 54.11, quoted above.
[149] Cf. *doc. chr.* 1.36.40.

languages which bind human groups together or that humans share with demons. essentially, a 'private code',[150] a humanly-instituted and more or less arbitrary agreement by a group of people to use signs in particular ways.[151] The Christian belief in the over-riding importance of the love of God and neighbour enables the Church's life to be anchored in an objective reality in which things are valued for what they truly are in a properly ordered love.[152] When it comes to the interpretation of the slippery and ambiguous signs that are encountered in Scripture, members of this particular linguistic community can be confident that, because they understand that love of God and neighbour are the '*terminus* of all scriptural signification',[153] they cannot go too badly wrong.

The belief that love is the key to understanding the Scriptures paves the way for Augustine to espouse a relatively free interpretation of scripture, within certain limits.[154] This is a particular feature of book twelve of the *Confessions*, in which Augustine argues that even when interpreters of Scripture have failed to understand the author's intention in a particular scriptural text (important though this is),[155] their different interpretations can all be valuable so long as they are held within the all-encompassing truths that the Bible teaches about the love of God and neighbour.[156] Indeed, as O'Donnell writes, 'the emphasis in this book on allowing the plurality of views to thrive [is itself]...an embodiment of the command to love one's neighbour.[157]

Moreover, as well as providing a hermeneutic key to the truth, *caritas* further creates a true bond of association between peoples, a bond which associations that rest on *cupiditas* (the only other alternative) appear to provide but which they ultimately cannot deliver. For the linguistic pacts and agreements that exist between members of the Roman Empire or between humans and demons in fact only bring them into a semblance of a true community. In the case of the Roman

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[150] Cf. Markus (1996), 146.
[151] This and the following paragraph draw on Babcock (1995) and Markus (1996).
[152] Cf. *doc. chr.* 1.26.27-1.28.29.
[153] Babcock (1994), 152; cf. *doc. chr.* 3.10.14.
[154] On Augustine's biblical exegesis, see Bonner (1970); Hamilton (1990); Harrison (1992), 82-5; Markus (1996), 16-22; Williams (2001).
[155] Cf. *conf.* 12.18.27.
[156] Cf. *conf.* 12.18.27-26.36; *doc. chr.* 3.27.38.
[157] O'Donnell (1992), 3: 341.

Empire, as we have seen, the harmony that a common language brings is based, contradictorily, on continuing violence and bloodshed. Augustine. Babcock writes, 'exposes the social weakness of schemes of signification that rest only on human institution. These schemes appear to sustain, but in fact undermine, the bonds of society. They cater, in the end, to private desire rather than inculcating a common love.'[158] By contrast, the shared possession of the truth creates a communion that truly unites people with one another and engenders concord.[159]

c. Christ and the linguistic community[160]

When we listen to a psalm, or to a prophet or to the law, all of which were set down in writing before our Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh, our whole endeavour must therefore be to find Christ in what we hear and discern his presence in it.[161]

From the very beginning of his expositions of the Psalms,[162] Augustine understands these texts as a prophecy of Chirst. As Fiedrowicz writes, '[t]heir bearing on Christ, their transparency to Christ, becomes the criterion for correct understanding of the psalms, an understanding to be attained in no other way than by recognising the presence of Christ in them'.[163]

The Jews are, for Augustine, a vivid case study of a group that, unable to see Christ in the Bible, consequently cannot distinguish signs from the realities to which those signs point. Thus, like Moses, their faces are still veiled.[164] Lacking Christ, they lack the hermeneutical key that will unlock the systems of signification that exist in their own scriptures: 'they retain the law, they retain the prophets. They read it all, they chant it all; but they fail to see him who is the light of the prophets, Christ Jesus'.[165] In Augustine's understanding, the Jews are *capsarii*, satchellers who, like slaves in the service of a master, carry the holy

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[158] Babcock (1995), 156.
[159] *conf.* 12.30.41: *in hac diversitate sententiarum verarum concordiam pariat ipsa veritas* ; cf. *conf.* 12.25.34.
[160] The discussion below draws on Cameron (1999), 290-6; Fiedrowicz (2000), 43-60.
[161] *en. Ps.* 98.1.
[162] Cf. *en. Ps.* 1.1.
[163] Fiedrowicz (2000), 44.
[164] *en. Ps.* 64.6.
[165] *en. Ps.* 58.2.2; cf. *en. Ps.* 33.1.6.

books on behalf of Christians: 'they carry our books for us, and we draw life from books that once were theirs'.[166] They give the Church useful service as *librarians*, who carry the prophecies of Christ and thus prevent pagans from alleging 'that we Christians have composed them, fabricating prophecies to buttress the gospel we preach'.[167] The Jews quite literally fall under the weight of the books they carry, while their masters, the Christians, make great strides forward by reading those same texts.[168] Jews are overburdened by the great weight of signs that they carry around with them in their scriptures, whilst Christians, knowing the realities to which those signs refer, can travel around free and unimpeded.[169]

But, while Christ may indeed be the indispensable key that unlocks all the scriptures, it is far from self-evident how this key should best be used. In his efforts to understand the psalms christologically, Augustine owes a clear debt to the *Liber Regularum* of the (ex-)Donatist writer, Tyconius,[170] a debt that he acknowledges by summarising Tyconius's rules in the third book of *de Doctrina Christiana*. Tyconius's first rule, *On the Lord and his Body* notes that some parts of Scripture only make sense if the reader understands that the text makes transitions between speaking of Christ and speaking of his body, the Church:

> Whether scripture is speaking about the Lord or about his body, the church, reason alone discerns, persuading or, such is the force of truth, compelling us to recognise what pertains to each. In some cases, the subject is a single person; and yet the different functions of the two teach us that the one person is actually twofold.[171]

As Augustine explains in his gloss of the rule, 'we should not let it baffle us when a text passes from head to body and from body to head, and yet still refers to one and the same person'.[172] Tyconius's principle allows Augustine to

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[166] *en. Ps.* 136.18; cf. 40.14 cf. *adu. iud.* 9.
[167] *en. Ps.* 56.9.
[168] *en. Ps.* 56.9, *illi portando deficiant, illi legendo proficiant.*
[169] On Augustine's attitude to the Jews, see Cohen (1999), 24-64; Fredriksen (1995), 320; Haynes (1995), 27-33.
[170] Augustine summarises Tyconius's rules in *doc. chr.* 3.31.44. For discussions of Augustine's debt to Tyconius, see Bright (1985); Cameron (1999), 290-6; Tilley (1993).
[171] *Lib. Reg.* 1.
[172] *doc. chr.* 31.44.

understand the Psalms as the voice of Christ in a way that formerly would have been impossible in many places. For now, the most unpromising and difficult texts in the Psalter can be made patient of a Christological interpretation by applying them to the body rather than the head. Cameron charts Augustine's developing use of this principle of interpretation through the *Enarrationes*. In earlier expositions, Augustine tends to follow Tyconius more closely, by carefully distinguishing between the voices of Christ and the Church within each psalm: 'whatever is said in this psalm and cannot apply in strict terms to the Lord himself, the Head, should be referred to the Church...'[173] Cameron argues that, as time progresses, Augustine's developing meditation on the importance of the Incarnation leads him to stress more clearly the fundamental *unity* that lies hidden in the distinction between the two persons. Christ's sharing human flesh provides a warrant for identifying his voice and that of the Church ever more closely with one another (whilst continuing to distinguish between them and not confusing them[174]). An important summary of this comes in the exposition of Ps. 142:

> Christ and the Church, two in one flesh. The fact that they are two points to the distance between us and the majesty of God. They are two, undeniably, for we are not the Word, we were not with God in the beginning, not through us were all things made. But when we consider the flesh, there we find Christ, and in Christ we find both him and ourselves. Small wonder that we find this mystery in the psalms. There he says many things in his own name, yet all of it is said as though one single individual were speaking. Wonder not that there are two with one voice, if there are two in one flesh.[175]

As has already been discussed, the central argument of *De Magistro* was that prior understanding is indispensable to any sort of learning. A prior understanding of the *res* is necessary if the *signa* which point to it are to be grasped. The agent of this prior understanding is, first and foremost, Christ the interior teacher, who resides within individual Christians and reveals to them the meaning of signs which would, otherwise, be opaque. This stress on the

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[173] *en. Ps.* 17.51.
[174] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.22.5, where Augustine, in his final exposition of the Psalms, does distinguish the senses.
[175] *en. Ps.* 142.3.

importance of interior illumination is one that Augustine carries through into his preaching:

> When people announce the good news, what is happening externally? What am I doing right now as I preach? I am pouring a clatter of words into your ears. But my words are meaningless, my sermon is senseless, unless he who dwells within (*ille qui intus est*) reveals their sense to you.[176]

Most commonly, however, in the *Enarrationes*, this insight takes a related but somewhat different turn. In the *Enarrationes*, as in *De Magistro*, human beings seeking to understand signs need the prior understanding that only Christ is able to impart. However, as writers such as Cameron and Fiedrowicz emphasise, the *Enarrationes* have a focus that is christo-ecclesial rather than individual. Thus, whereas in *De Magistro*, the emphasis is upon the interior teacher living within individual Christians, in the *Enarrationes*, it is on the community of the Church which lives within its teacher in the one *totus Christus*. To put it succinctly, in *De Magistro*, Christ lives in us; in the *Enarrationes*, we live in Christ.[177]

In the *Enarrationes*, it is by virtue of their membership of the body of Christ that members of the Church have the all-important prior understanding that (here as in *De Magistro*) will enable them to interpret the signs that they encounter within the scriptural text. And, as a result of this prior understanding, they discover that when the words of scripture are communicated and preached, they come not as unfamiliar intrusions but as something that they already deeply know:

> I used to say to a tree, *You are my father*, and to a stone, *You begot me* (Jer 2:27); but now I say, *Our Father, who art in heaven.* To him I cried with my voice, because it is my own voice now; I am not mouthing the words of others. When I used to cry to stone deities in the idle chatter of my ancestral traditions I was mouthing the words of other people; but now when I cry to the Lord in words he has given me and he has inspired, I am crying with a voice of my own.[178]

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[176] *Io. eu. tr.* 26.7; cf. Lawless (1994), 28.
[177] On the Christocentricity of Augustine's biblical exegesis, cf. Bonner (1970), 560.
[178] *en. Ps.* 65.21.

Thus, the Christian community discovers its identity in and through the scriptural text: we 'recognize ourselves in the words of the prophet',[179] in the voice of the Psalms, we 'find *our own* voice';[180] 'we are within his body, we are members of it, and we find ourselves speaking these words'.[181] Those who turn their thoughts to a psalm, 'recognise *themselves* in it'. [182] 'Listen to...[David] crying out, and cry out with him; listen to him groaning, and groan too; listen to him weeping and add your tears to his; listen to him corrected and share his joy.'[183] For Augustine, as for Thomas Merton, '[t]his is the secret of the Psalms. Our identity is hidden in them. In them we find ourselves, and God. In these fragments He has revealed not only Himself to us but ourselves in Him'.[184]

The identity that is thus experienced between human words and the words of Scripture is ultimately, then, a matter of grace. In order for human words to be true, they must be given by God. Sunden compares Plotinus's view that 'the way of prayer...is always within our power'[185] with Augustine's insistence in the *Confessions* that 'I can say nothing right to other people unless you have heard it from me first, nor can you even hear anything of the kind from me which you have not first told me'.[186] As Sunden notes, for Augustine to pray truly to God, he must pray in words that God has himself first given. Thus, by contrast with Plotinus, prayer is far from being always within his own power.

To summarise this section, members of the Church have three related advantages as they learn to understand the difficult signs that the Psalter throws at them. In the first place, like any linguistic community, good or bad, a shared language creates a context for growth in understanding. Secondly, because they understand that love is the ultimate *terminus* to which the scriptural signs point, they possess a unique hermeneutical key as well as a sure bond of association. Thirdly, their membership within the body of the one Christ, the teacher, endows

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[179] *en. Ps.* 30.3.1.
[180] *en. Ps.* 40.6, my italics; cf. *en. Ps.* 51.6.
[181] *en. Ps.* 37.6.
[182] *en. Ps.* 53.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 34.1.1; 59.1; 60.1; 62.2; 63.1; 119.9; 122.3; 123.3.
[183] *en. Ps.* 50.5.
[184] Quoted in Sunden (1987), 247.
[185] *Enn.* 5.1; cf. Sunden (1987), 378-9.
[186] *conf.* 10.2.2.

them with a previous affinity for the realities under discussion, enabling them to find their own voice in that of the Psalms. As a result, the word that goes out is able to find a place for itself in them.

3. ...*invenit terram ubi germinet et fructum ferat*: The word germinates and bears fruit

a. Motivation

Augustine's account in *De catechizandis rudibus* of the problems experienced by catechists as they struggle to convey their meaning to their listeners has been discussed earlier in this chapter. These problems revolved around the inadequacy of signs to convey the 'inner word' without, in some way, diminishing it. What seems evident from the *Enarrationes* is that when it comes to liturgical language, an equal and opposite problem arises. For, singing the familiar words of the psalms and other parts of the liturgy, people find not that their lips are inadequate to what is in their hearts but an opposite problem: that the words on their lips outrun the commitments and faith that they actually hold in their hearts.[187]

It certainly appears from the *Enarrationes* that members of Augustine's congregation in Hippo appreciated the psalms and enjoyed singing them,[188] but, nonetheless, he often expresses anxiety about the extent to which they had truly internalised their meaning, since 'the song on your lips demands a like song from your heart';[189] 'you can test the truth of what you are singing only if you are beginning to act in harmony with your song'.[190] Ideally, the psalm should function both as 'a melody sung and a message understood'.[191] As Bonner notes, writing on the importance of meditation in Augustine's Monastic Rule, '(t)he Christian must identify himself with the words of the prayers which he utters and

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[187] On the liturgical context of the psalms for Augustine, see Fiedrowicz (2000), 16-18.
[188] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118, *Prooem.*
[189] *en. Ps.* 48.2.10; cf. 39.16; 53.10.
[190] en. Ps. 119.9: *non poteritis probare quam vera cantetis, nisi coeperitis facere quod cantatis.*
[191] *en. Ps.* 132.1: *ista suavis melodia, tam in cantico quam in intellectu.*

not simply repeat a formula'.[192] For Augustine's congregation, the liturgy provides an attractive set of words but words are not enough. The Church is not concerned with lip service[193] but with the service of the heart. Blackbirds, parrots, crows and magpies can all be taught to sing,[194] says Augustine, but it is uniquely granted to human beings, as God's rational creation, to 'sing psalms with understanding',[195] by which is implied not just an intellectual grasp of the realities about which they are singing but a clear-eyed commitment to them and love of them. 'Preaching the truth is nothing, if our heart is at variance with our tongue.'[196] In the phraseology of the Old Latin, God must be exalted not only by the tongue but also 'under the tongue'.[197] Indeed, as has already been noted, the tongues of fallen human beings are unreliable: they cannot be relied upon to express accurately their inner thoughts and intentions.

Commenting on Ps. 102:20, *Bless the Lord, all you who are his powers, his servants who do his bidding*, Augustine asks his congregation,

> What is the use of singing a hymn with your tongue, if your life breathes sacrilege? By your wicked conduct you have set many tongues wagging in blasphemy. Your tongue is occupied with hymn-singing, but the tongues of those who see you are busy with blasphemies.[198]

Because Christ himself is the Truth,[199] membership of his body requires there to be no variation between the words that Christians express with their lips and the beliefs, commitments and desires that they hold in their hearts. Rather, the heart and the lips must enjoy perfect agreement and synchronicity.[200]

The coordination between the lips and hearts of a congregation singing the Psalms finds a prototype in the example of the martyrs who, in times of persecution, made confessions that perfectly reflected the faith that they held

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[192] Bonner (2004), 95; cf. *reg.* 2.3.
[193] *en. Ps.* 61.10: *Non attendo ad os.*
[194] Cf. *en. Ps.* 18.2.1; cf. Fiedrowicz (2000), 18.
[195] Cf. *en. Ps.* 18.2.1: *scienter autem cantare, naturae hominis divina voluntate concessum est*; cf. *en. Ps.* 46.9; Fiedrowicz (2000), 18.
[196] *en. Ps.* 66.10.
[197] *en. Ps.* 65.21: *exaltavi sub lingua*; cf. Boulding (2000-4), 3: 304, n. 44.
[198] *en. Ps.* 102.27.
[199] *en. Ps.* 39.18; cf Jn. 14:6; *conf.* 10.40.65.
[200] *en. Ps.* 39.16: c*onsentiant labia tua cordi tuo.*

within their hearts. By contrast, the lips of those who denied Christ 'bear witness in opposition to [their] heart'.[201] The martyrs' lives and deaths perfectly model truthful speech: they are 'brave under torture, faithful in their confession, truthful in speech'.[202] But while for those undergoing persecution, the danger is that fear will prevent them from speaking truthfully what is in their heart, for members of a mixed congregation, living in relatively peaceful conditions, an equal and opposite danger is that, in their apathy and indifference, they will hypocritically sing words with their lips that they do not really believe, or intend to live out:

> The lips must proclaim what is in the heart: this is an injunction against fear. But the heart must have in it what the lips say: this is an injunction against insincerity.[203]

A partial parallel with this theme of the correspondence between lips and heart might be said to be present in Augustine's own life and experience of conversion as these are recounted in the *Confessions*. Lienhard, stressing that, generally speaking '[a]ll ancient reading was reading aloud',[204] draws attention to the way in which the career of Augustine, influenced by Ambrose, signals the change from the classical past to a new, Christian future,[205] of which the transition from reading aloud to reading silently is a sign. Commenting on Augustine's famous account of the way in which, at his conversion, he picks up the letter to the Romans, 'I snatched it up, opened it and read in silence',[206] Lienhard argues that, '[t]his act of silent reading is, symbolically, Augustine's rejection of his past and the beginning of his new life... The move from *lingua* to *cor*, from "tongue" to "heart", encapsulates Augustine's life'.[207]

In one sense, Lienhard might seem to be over-stating the case. For, as has been argued, the life of preaching and pastoral activity is one that very decidedly involves the tongue: the preacher is called to communicate. It is thus hard to accept that a move away from speaking and towards silence describes the

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[201] *en. Ps.* 39.17: *contra cor tuum testimonium dicunt labia tua.*
[202] *en. Ps.* 39.16: *in tormentis patientes, in confessione fideles, in sermone veraces.*
[203] *en. Ps.* 39.16.
[204] Lienhard (1996), 10.
[205] Cf. *conf.* 6.3.3.
[206] *conf.* 8.12.29: *arripui, aperui, et legi in silentio*; cf. *conf.* 7.21.27; O'Donnell (1992), 3: 66.
[207] Lienhard (1996), 13.

trajectory of Augustine's entire career. However, what is certainly important is that the task of preaching is to engender that harmony between hearts and lips which can all too easily be lost: '...let us make these prayers our own with heart and tongue and our whole inner being'.[208] If the word of God is not simply to be sown, but to germinate and bear fruit, it must become something that is more than simply a sound on the lips.

b. Action[209]

The question of the inner motivation of those who sing the psalms and listen to sermons about them is vital because, for Augustine, it is only when people's wills and hearts are moved that truly good actions can follow. Commenting on Ps. 102:21, *Bless the Lord, all you who are his powers, his servants who do his bidding*, Augustine tells his congregation,

> If you want to bless the Lord, do his will. Build on rock, not on sand. To hear and not carry out what you hear is to build on sand. Anyone who neither hears the word nor acts according to it does not build at all.[210]

Augustine's emphasis on the importance of teaching has already been discussed but for all that teaching remains a central concern, increased knowledge and understanding of the Bible is not in fact the end product that the *Enarrationes* aim to achieve. As Cavadini puts it,

> Christ's work is not finally to teach us something – knowledge is not enough – in fact it 'puffeth up' (1 Cor 8:1). Christ's accomplishment is to rework our affections, that is, to create in us a new character, described, again with 1 Corinthians (13:8), as 'faith, hope and charity'.[211]

Knowledge of the scriptural text and even that text itself are not ultimately important: it is only the 'curious' whose primary interest is in them and not the

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[208] *en. Ps.* 39.16: *corde lingua, omnibus medullis nostris haec dicimus*.
[209] This section draws substantially on Cavadini (1995); Harrison (1993) (2000b); Patout Burns (1995).
[210] *en. Ps.* 102.28.
[211] Cavadini (1995), 167; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.29.1; *doc. chr.* 2.42.63; *Io. eu. tr.* 27.5; 169; Harrison (1992), 78; Naldini (1996), 22; Patout Burns (1995).

realities to which they point.[212] As Augustine writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, the ascetic lives of men and women in the desert testify to the fact that those who live in faith, hope and charity actually themselves have no need of the scriptures.[213] Teaching might be seen, therefore, as the preacher's *primary* aim but, in the longer term, such teaching will only be of use if it brings about action and a change of life in those who hear the word:

> Christ is shouting to you, 'I'm coming!' Doesn't that fill you with awe? Dearly beloved, we have often told you that preaching the truth is nothing, if our heart is at variance with our tongue. And hearing the truth is nothing, if no fruit follows from the hearing.[214]

Evidence that a sermon has truly done its work will come when its audience have not just been instructed but have also been moved and, thus, prompted into action. The speech of a wise man is greeted by his congregation 'by their groans...sometimes also by their tears, and finally by the change in their lives'.[215] 'The proper fruit' of a sermon 'is good works; the proper fruit is sincere, willed love, not only for your nearest and dearest but also for your enemy.'[216]

Augustine is confident that the sermons of a good preacher can indeed bring about radical change in the lifestyles of his hearers but such change is not brought about by a preacher's commanding his congregation to act in a certain way and the congregation then making the rational choice to obey – this might be described as the Pelagian approach to the subject.[217] Rather 'we desire the good when it begins to be sweet'.[218] Good actions are truly brought about when, through the eloquence of preaching, the individual's will is changed and his desire for the good and for God is stimulated. When these things truly take place, then right actions will naturally follow on from them and the word that is preached will bear its fruit.

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[212] Cf. Bonner (1970), 548. The term *curiositas* will be explored in ch. 2, and its use in relation to certain kinds of intellectual endeavour will be discussed in ch. 4.
[213] *doc. chr.* 1.39.43.
[214] *en. Ps.* 66.10.
[215] *doc. chr.* 4. 24.53; cf. 4.4.6; Cavadini (1995), 165; Patout Burns (1995), 189.
[216] *en. Ps.* 103.1.19: *fructus congruus opera bona; fructus congruus sincera dilectio, non solum fratris, sed et inimici.*
[217] This will be discussed further in ch. 4.
[218] Cf. *c. ep. Pel. 2.21*; cf. Harrison (1993).

In a theme that will be discussed in later chapters, it is evident that, for Augustine, the ability of a preacher to stimulate his listeners to good works is ultimately a matter of God's grace, working in and through 'observable human processes'.[219] For, it is God's hands that 'hold us and our sermons alike'.[220] As Patout Burns remarks,

> Augustine attempted to coordinate his insistence on the importance of eloquence in preaching the Christian faith with his assertion of the necessity of an interior grace which makes teaching effective. Indeed, divine inspiration and guidance of the preacher provides one explanation of how the mind and will of the hearer is moved and even controlled by God.[221]

c. Desire

The ultimate aim of the sermon is action and people will only really act rightly when their wills have truly been conformed to what is right, when they find that their hearts as well as their lips are attuned to the psalms that they sing in the liturgy. In order that this should happen, the preacher must, by his words, evoke the desire through which God's grace will operate to draw people to himself. Commenting on book four of *De Doctrina Christiana*, Williams writes,

> [Augustine] stresses...that learning from Scripture is a process – not a triumphant moment of penetration and mastery, but an extended play of invitation and exploration...The Christian life itself...is in constant danger of premature closure, the supposition that the end of desire has been reached and the ambiguities of history and language put behind us; and thus the difficulty of Scripture is itself a kind of parable of our condition. We cannot properly enjoy what we swiftly and definitively possess: such possession results in inaction and ultimately contempt for the object.[222]

To those who know how to distinguish them from the realities to which they point, the scriptural signs constantly stimulate desire and lead people on, cutting off the possibility of finding prematurely a rest that, ultimately, should only be

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[219] Patout Burns (1995), 188.
[220] *doc. chr.* 4.28.63: *in cuius manu sunt et nos et sermones nostri.*
[221] Patout Burns (1995), 190. These themes will be discussed further in ch. 4, in relation to the Pelagian controversy and Augustine's exposition of Ps. 118.
[222] Williams (1989), 142.

found in God.[223] In Williams's words, '[a] language which indefinitely postpones fulfilment or enjoyment is appropriate to the Christian discipline of spiritual homelessness, to the character of the believing life as pilgrimage'.[224] Those who use language are constantly aware of how difficult communication is, how serious are the shortcomings of the signs they have at their disposal, but this awareness, far from causing a sense of hopelessness or despair, can actually be turned to advantage by the scriptural authors and by good preachers. As Williams writes, 'language in its fluidity and displacements is inseparably interwoven with the restlessness or openness of desire',[225] and such restlessness and openness of desire is exactly what Christians ought, in Augustine's view, to have.

Thus, scripture and preaching cast in a very different light the labour that characterises human efforts to communicate with one another. It has been noted how, in the aftermath of the Fall, the extraction of meaning from signs has become, for Adam's descendents, a sweat, a *labor*. Adam is condemned to eat bread by the sweat of his brow.[226] Similarly, fallen man is compelled to labour to understand the biblical text, in preaching and in listening to sermons. Equipped with the knowledge of the ultimate realities, however, this labour becomes a joy: an exhilarating, ongoing journey of exploration and discovery: '[a]ll the utterances of God are to us a delight; the sweetness that we find in his word is to us an inducement to speak, and to you an incentive to listen, so that with the help of him who grants us such exquisite enjoyment, our land may yield its fruit'.[227] As Harrison writes,

> ...the very darkness and obscurity of man's temporal life, and especially of the revelation of God recounted in Scripture, becomes a positive quality for Augustine. It is treated as sacramental, as inspiring man's desire and love, as demanding of him an intuitive, imaginative, symbolic, image-making apprehension of God's Word...[228]

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[223] Cf. *conf.* 1.1.1.
[224] Williams (1989), 142-3.
[225] Williams (1989), 148; cf. Markus (1996), 114.
[226] Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 20.30.
[227] *en. Ps.* 61.1.
[228] Harrison (1992), 95-6.

As with sweat and labour, so with bread: the scriptural, exegetical and indeed sacramental bread that human beings are condemned to eat because of their sin is that very same bread that nourishes them and that symbolises Christ, the one who is ultimately desirable:

> There was good reason for the punishment imposed on us at the time of the first sin: that we must eat bread in the sweat of our brow. Only be sure that what you eat is really bread. It is the true bread if it is Christ; as he said of himself, *I am the living bread which has come down from heaven* (Jn 6.51).[229]

Thus, Scripture and preaching teach the lesson that the obscurity and opacity of language can under certain circumstances have a positive value because they stimulate desire for God. It is nothing like the value that would attach to face to face vision of God, but it is value, nonetheless.

Moreover, Scripture engenders desire by ingeniously meeting people at their different levels, giving each what they need. The uninstructed receive clear teaching but the more advanced receive, in the very obscurity of the text, something to stimulate them and lead them further.[230] Fiedrowicz points to Augustine's analogy between the human body and the psalms upon which he is commenting. Each psalm, it could be said, has a soul (*anima psalmi*), a basic meaning that is available to all but they also have a depth of inner meaning (*mysterium/sacramentum*), available to those who seek to go further.[231] As Augustine says in the opening remarks to his exposition of Ps. 46,

> Through the holy books that make up his scriptures, the Lord our God has poured out for us the faith in which we live, and on which we live; and he has done so in a great variety of different modes. He constantly varies the words he uses, and these words are laden with mystery (*sacramenta verborum*); but he commends to us one same faith through them all. The same thing is expressed in many different ways so that the mode of expression may always seem fresh and never bore us, but the underlying truth be held firmly and maintain our hearts in unity.[232]

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[229] *en. Ps.* 138.1; cf. 32.29; 34.1.1; 90.2.6; on preaching as a sacrament, cf. Lawless (1994).
[230] Cf. *cat. rud.* 9.13; *conf.* 3.5.9; *doc. chr.* 4.6.9.
[231] Fiedrowicz (2000), 19; cf. *en. Ps.* 43.2; 44.1; 77.1.
[232] *en. Ps.* 46.1.

By the use of allegory, by expressing familiar truths in different ways, Scripture and preaching afford 'the opportunity to find delicious new flavours in what we already know...enticing us to listen to them again with delight; for when the idiom is diversified, the ancient truth seems ever new as it is presented differently'.[233] As Patout Burns puts it, '[t]hrough the process of deciphering allegories, the Christian reader comes to a knowledge which engenders delight and thereby moves the person to love and to seek the figured realities'.[234]

This further opens up an approach to the use of rhetoric which is somewhat different from what might be expected from Augustine's somewhat austere insistence on the priority of teaching.[235] Harrison argues that, having established in *de Doctrina Christiana* that the primary aim of preaching is indeed to teach the truth,[236] to which eloquence must always play the secondary role of 'an inseparable, even if uninvited lady in waiting',[237] Augustine re-connects with Cicero's second aim of rhetoric, that of pleasing and delighting an audience. By contrast with classical authors, Augustine's 'Christian aesthetic' does not intend delight to be an end in itself but rather a means of engaging a listener and moving him towards the truth. Harrison writes,

> If truth is beautiful; if beauty is delightful; if delight is the way in which God chooses to orient the fallen will towards Himself, there is nothing artificial, arbitrary, misleading, superfluous or decadent about describing Scripture as a work of literature, or using rhetoric to preach. To seek out the beauty of Scripture, to make preaching aesthetically pleasing, is, rather, to do full justice to their subject matter and to make it accessible.[238]

But, as argued above, any deployment of pleasing obscurities or of eloquence is never for its own sake but, rather, because the desire that these engender will move their listeners to action. As Patout Burns writes,

> In the analysis of the different styles of eloquence and the persuasion proper to each, Augustine insisted that the Christian preacher must always aim at action. The verbal ornaments which

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[233] *en. Ps.* 46.1, cf. *conf.* 10.27.38; *doc. chr.* 2.6.7; cf. Patout Burns (1995), 186.
[234] Patout Burns (1995), 185.
[235] This section draws on Harrison (1992), 67-80; (2000b); Patout Burns (1995).
[236] Cf. *doc. chr.* 4.12.28.
[237] *doc. chr.* 4.6.10.
[238] Harrison (2000b), 224; cf. Harrison (1992), 70.

delight hearers may be used to gain their attention, but the objective must always be a decision to act according to truth.[239]

Conclusion

In a chapter entitled *The Language of Love*, it might be appropriate to conclude by highlighting some of the points that have been made about both language and love.

To take the first of these, it has been argued that Augustine's preaching sheds new light on the pessimistic views about the potential of language that he frequently expresses. The preacher, despite the difficulties of language, is called not to guard the purity of the inner word but to speak out, despite the difficulties: the word must resound. The preacher's efforts to do this are underwritten by the Incarnation: the fact that the eternal Word has taken human flesh and lived in human time ensures that language, for all its reliance on physical and sequential processes, is not always destined for failure. Moreover, the shared familiarity with the language of scripture that the Christian community builds up, over time and through the *labor* of preaching, can offset some of the communication deficit caused by the Fall. This common language binds its users together, forming them as a linguistic community: the Word can find a place for itself. Despite their brokenness and opacity (or, in fact sometimes *because* of these things), words when rightly used (for example, in scripture and preaching) can delight audiences, moving them towards the good: the Word is able to bear fruit.

Love underlies this more positive account of language at every point. It is because of love that the preacher or catechist is inspired to speak, even when he is reluctant to do so, reaching out to his audience and, so to speak, dwelling in their world, after the example of Christ's self-emptying and indwelling love in the Incarnation. Love also gives the hermeneutical key that allows members of a Christian congregation truly to understand the scriptures and, by creating such

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[239] Patout Burns (1995), 189; cf. Harrison (1992), 78; Sutherland (1990), 143-4.

shared understanding, love binds them together in a true community. Moreover, by evoking love and desire for the divine realities, through the medium of signs, with the constant restlessness and displacement that these bring to their interpreters, the preacher spurs his congregation to right action which, again, is expressed in love of God and neighbour.

Chapter Two

THE PREACHING AND PRACTICE OF LOVE

Augustine tackles a pastoral issue in the *Enarrationes*

Introduction: The problem of the shows

> Accordingly, you will have to witness many drunkards, covetous men, deceivers, gamesters, adulterers, fornicators, men who bind upon their persons sacrilegious charms and others given up to sorcerers and astrologers, and diviners practised in all kinds of impious arts. You will also have to observe how those very crowds which fill the theatres on the festal days of the pagans also fill the churches on the festal days of the Christians.[1]

Public games of various kinds - animal-bating, chariot racing, and the theatre in particular - flourished in the Roman Empire in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.[2] In North Africa, there were particular centres of the shows, such as Carthage and Bulla Regia, but it is likely that every town would have witnessed days and seasons when the *munera* of wealthy donors provided an enthusiastic populace with thrilling entertainments. In addition to their entertainment value, the shows served to remind different sections of society of their pagan roots, and perhaps also served to foster a sense of social and civic cohesion.[3]

The most obvious aspect of Augustine's treatment of the shows in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* is that they are consistently hostile. He may not, for reasons that will be discussed below, thunder against them in the grand manner of Salvian or Orosius, who, in his *History against the Pagans*, even went so far as to comment that the shows were to blame for the sack of Rome,[4] but, as Van der Meer remarks, 'when he feels in censorious mood, it is the theatre against which he inveighs in nine cases out of ten'.[5] Such an assessment of Augustine's views is supported by Lepelley, who writes about the 'hostility *invariably*

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[1] *cat. rud.* 25.48; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 6.17.
[2] For a description of the various types of entertainment, cf. Van der Meer (1961), 47-56. As Van der Meer notes, gladiatorial combat had, by the time of Augustine, become illegal.
[3] Cf. Lepelley (1979), 376-84.
[4] *adu. Paganos* 4.21.5, *theatra incusanda, non tempora*, quoted in Chambers (1903), 18.
[5] Van der Meer (1961), 48.

manifested by Augustine and other ecclesiastical writers with respect to this aspect of municipal life'.[6]

A somewhat different view is provided by R.A. Markus in his stimulating chapter on the subject in *The End of Ancient Christianity*.[7] Since this will be discussed at several stages in this chapter, his argument will be briefly summarised. Markus outlines the official view, expressed in the *Codex Theodosianus* that 'secular festivals, rejoicing, shows and banquets could be dissociated from their religious origins'[8] so long as, where possible, their dates did not coincide with those of Christian festivals. He argues that the ability of lay Christians to combine celebration of festivals with church attendance implies that they recognised 'an implicit distinction between "sacred" and "secular"'.[9]

On the specific question of Augustine's attitude to the shows, Markus acknowledges Augustine's abhorrence (shared with his brother bishops) of gladiatorial combats but argues for a slightly different attitude to the shows, races and games and the feasting that accompanied them:

> On his own testimony as a young man he was moved to tears by theatrical shows. Though often hardest, in later life, on what he saw as his own youthful failings, and impatient with the impulses of his passionate nature, he was notably mild in the views of theatrical performances that he came to hold later as a priest and a bishop. He had valued the rhythms of dance and music: they attuned the human mind to the universal rhythm and cosmic harmony implanted by God in His creation. Augustine's youthful enthusiasm for them never quite vanished, though it often came to be toned down. Of shows of all kinds, banquets and festivities, he took a somewhat less favourable view; but his hostility must not be exaggerated. In a sermon he preached, probably in 393, on the occasion of a banquet in honour of Venus...he said 'these things are to be tolerated, not loved': a statement rightly described by its most careful commentator as 'so mild a comment'.[10]

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[6] Lepelley (1979), 376, my italics.
[7] Markus (1990), ch. 7. Markus's list of references (pages 121-3) have been particularly useful for the purposes of this chapter.
[8] Markus (1990), 109; cf. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.17.
[9] Markus (1990), 110.
[10] Markus (1990), 111.

Markus argues that Augustine's tone decisively changed around the year 399, with the arrival of imperial commissioners in Carthage 'to destroy the temples of the false gods and smash their images'.[11] He notes Augustine's encouragement to the Christians of Carthage to avoid violent anti-pagan demonstrations and concentrate on breaking the idols in the hearts of the pagans. However, he also notes that 'Augustine's attempt to restrain violence and to prevent a rift within the Christian congregation marks the beginning of a swing away from his earlier, easy-going attitude, and towards the harsher tone familiar from the polemical pages of the *City of God*.'[12] Thus, the tensions at the end of the fourth century had the effect of narrowing the neutral, secular space that Augustine would formerly have allowed the *spectacula* to occupy and lead him to think in more polarised terms: '[c]onfrontation had turned Augustine's preaching into a summons to the Christian people to take sides'.[13] Such a change in attitude, Markus argues, coincides with the period of Augustine's 'most uncritical endorsement of the Theodosian ideology and of his most enthusiastic approval of the official enforcement of Christian orthodoxy'.[14] The intervention of the government brought Augustine's 'conciliatory' attitude to an end, with the result that civic celebrations lost what had formerly seemed to him to be their real, if limited, value in fostering the harmony of secular society:

> The mixed citizen body dissolved into the rival religious groups which still survived within the flourishing municipal life of many African towns, now to be increasingly 'tribalised' in a sudden reversal of the trend towards co-existence. Communal celebrations became engulfed in conflict and served as its symbols and as mechanisms of division in the community. The result was that rival sets of festivals came to define alternative systems of *kairoi*, running parallel in mutually exclusive cycles of sacred time.[15]

The polarising pressures, whether social or theological, that led Augustine towards an increasingly condemnatory attitude toward the shows conflicted, Markus suggests, with some of his deeper instincts. To paraphrase slightly, he

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[11] *ciu.* 18.54; cf. Markus (1990), 112.
[12] Markus (1990), 115.
[13] Markus (1990), 118.
[14] Markus (1990), 117.
[15] Markus (1990), 119.

suggests that Augustine at his best sees the value of the shows and is able to appreciate their socially integrative purpose. Markus writes,

> The paragraphs he devoted to these institutions in his *Of Christian Teaching* are interestingly complex: as we have noted, even the theatres, actors, dancers, mimes and pantomimes – the most reprehensible people in episcopal and even imperial eyes – were carefully placed not among the institutions through which men communicate with demons, but among those which are means of human communication. To be sure, he placed them among the useless and extravagant, not the useful and necessary. But in this key passage,[16] his silence about the circus and the hippodrome and the spectacles in general is notable. Did he perhaps want to allow himself elbow-room to think, or to allow his readers to think, that such celebrations and amusements are, unlike those of the theatre, even 'useful and necessary'? There may be a premonition here that these things are capable of helping to bring about that cohesion of human wills on which social harmony rests, whose fostering he commends in the very next paragraph and – with vastly greater urgency – in the *City of God*.[17]

After a survey of literature relating to the question, Markus sums up his opinion: '(1) that the few texts before 399 show no trace of the harsher views to be found in Augustine's later preaching and writing; (2) that there is a noticeable hardening of attitude in 399; and (3) that, despite this hardening, the texts from the post-399 period often also express the same milder views as are to be found in the earlier period.'[18]

This chapter will argue that, in fact, Augustine's thought is rooted not in an abrupt change of mind in the late 390s, but in his rejection of all forms of paganism at the time of his conversion, and in the traditional hostility of the North African church to the shows. It will also be argued that Augustine's dislike of the shows has deep roots, both in his own life history, and in many aspects of his thought.

In the background to Augustine's thinking about this issue is the uncompromising attack on the shows by Augustine's North African predecessor,

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[16] in *doc. chr.*, see below.
[17] Markus (1990), 121.
[18] Markus (1990), 123.

Tertullian, in his diatribe on the shows, *De Spectaculis*, written in 196-7. Tertullian, anxious to rebut the opinion that condemnation of the shows has no scriptural warrant, bases his attack on the opening verse of the Psalter, *Happy is the man who has not gone to the gathering of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence* (Ps. 1:1).[19] He takes this verse to hint at the charge of idolatry that underlies his attack on shows of all kinds, whether they are equestrian displays,[20] stage exhibitions,[21] athletic contests[22] or gladiatorial combats.[23] In reality, of course, says Tertullian, following Paul,[24] idols do not amount to anything and yet the Christian baptismal affirmations imply a complete renunciation of them and of all the works of the Devil:

> When we step into the water and profess the Christian faith in the terms prescribed by its law, we bear public witness that we have renounced the Devil and his pomp and his angels. What, however, shall we call the chief and foremost manifestation by which the Devil and his pomp and his angels are recognized, if not idolatry?... So if it shall be proved true that the entire apparatus of the spectacles originates from idolatry, we will have reached a decision in advance that our profession of faith in baptism refers also to the spectacles, since they belong to the Devil and his pomp and his angels because of the idolatry involved.[25]

This being the case, Tertullian is able to come to his famous conclusion that 'this is the principal sign of a man's conversion to the Christian faith, that he renounces the spectacles'.[26] Tertullian urges Christians to adopt a strongly separatist stance towards their neighbours who attend the shows:

> ...would that we did not live in the world with them! Still, we are separated from them in the things of the world because the world is God's but the things of the world are the Devil's.[27]

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[19] *spect.* 3. For Tertullian, the gathering of the ungodly stands for the vast crowd of heathen spectators; the way of sinners stands for the gangways in the theatre building and the chair of pestilence is the space for spectators.
[20] *spect.* 9.
[21] *spect.* 10.
[22] *spect.* 11.
[23] *spect.* 12.
[24] *spect.* 13; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4.
[25] *spect.* 4.
[26] *spect.* 24.
[27] *spect.* 15: *Utinam ne in saeculo quidem simul cum illis moraremur: sed tamen in saecularibus separamur, quia saeculum Dei est, saecularia autem diaboli.*

Augustine's comments on the shows, as we encounter them in the *Enarrationes*, have some important points of divergence from Tertullian. Among these is, as Markus notes, a lighter touch when it comes to the association between the shows and the realm of the demonic – although, as will be discussed below, hints of such an association may lie just under the surface. However, it nonetheless seems clear that for Augustine, as for Tertullian, attendance at the shows is incompatible with baptismal affirmations and renunciations. Thus, preaching on Psalm 80 (409-11), he tells his congregation,

> There are many among you who do not lead lives consistent with the baptism they received: look how many have today chosen to crowd into the circus rather than this basilica! And how many of the baptized are either setting up shop in the streets, or else complaining that there are no shops there.[28]

For Augustine, no less than for Tertullian, the renunciation of the shows is, or ought to be, a sign of Christian baptism, which carves out members of the Church as a distinct group from the rest of society. Baptised Christians, freed from past anxieties, are tested in the 'waters of contradiction' (*aquae contradictionis*) where their baptism is proved by their ability to withstand the pressure of friends and neighbours to attend festivals or circuses.[29] Whilst acknowledging the difficulties caused for Christians by the patronising remarks of pagan neighbours, Augustine endorses the behaviour of those who stand clearly and visibly apart from those around them in this respect:

> It sometimes happens that, when the performance in the theatre or amphitheatre comes to an end and the spectators' benches begin to spew out the dissolute crowd, these dissipated folk retain the fantasies of their empty pleasure in their mind and continue to feed on the memory of things that are not merely useless but positively harmful, enjoying impressions that seem pleasant but are in fact baleful. Then it often happens that they see some of God's servants passing by and recognize them from their style of dress or headgear, or because their faces are familiar. So the theatre-goers say in their own minds, or to one another, 'poor fellows, what they are missing!'[30]

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[28] *en. Ps.* 80.3; cf. 50.1.
[29] *en. Ps.* 80.10.
[30] *en. Ps.* 147.8 (409-12).

1. Aspects of the problem

a. Insanity

One particular formulation of Tertullian's that Augustine adopts is that of the circus's insanity.[31] And this charge is indeed highly characteristic of the way in which Augustine refers to the shows in the *Enarrationes*. Thus, spectators of the shows are 'crazy people',[32] 'going mad with excitement in the amphitheatre',[33] 'losing their minds in intense and manifold pleasures',[34] 'going demented with their foul, perverted pleasures',[35] bent on 'mad things of the circus'.[36] The glory of the shows 'drives people into madness'.[37] Indeed, when it comes to the shows, insanity is all around for 'where the performers are acclaimed by the insane, they themselves go insane, and so they all become insane, those who are watched, those who watch and the donor of the games'.[38]

While Augustine appears to draw his characterisation of the shows' insanity from the writing of Tertullian, more personal reflection on the experience of Alypius, his friend and former pupil, also plays a part. Augustine famously describes in book six of the *Confessions* how 'the whirlpool of Carthaginian morals, with their passion for empty public shows, sucked [Alypius] into the folly of the circus games (*insaniam circensium*)'.[39] Indeed, Augustine records his concern that Alypius's passion for the circus would cause him to throw away a career of high promise. On one occasion, Augustine uses an illustration in his class drawn from the circus games and is sarcastic about those captivated by their folly (*insania*). Alypius, rather than taking umbrage with his teacher as a lesser man might have done, 'with strict self-control...gave his mind a shaking, and all the filth of the circus games dropped away from him, and he stopped going to

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[31] *Apology*, 38.4: *insania circi*; cf. Chapot (1999), 823.
[32] *en. Ps.* 50.11 (*insani*); cf. 147.21 (*...insanorum qui sunt in amphitheatrum*).
[33] *en. Ps.* 32.3.25 (*in amphitheatrum... insaniunt*).
[34] *en. Ps.* 39.8 (*magnas et varias voluptates, in quibus ipsi insaniunt*); cf. 147.7.
[35] *en. Ps.* 98.5 (*insanire adhuc in voluptatibus*).
[36] *en. Ps.* 80.1 (*insania circi*).
[37] *en. Ps.* 149.10 (*homines insani effecti*).
[38] *en. Ps.* 149.10 (*...ubi clamatur ab insanis, insaniunt; et fiunt omnes insani, et qui spectatur, et qui spectat, et qui donat*); cf. *cat. rud.* 16.25. For a fourfold use of *insanio/insanitas* within the same sentence, cf. Canning (2006), 118, n. 168.
[39] *conf*. 6.7.11.

them'.[40] However, things are not quite so simple and, in the very next section of the book, Alypius is again seized by a love of the spectacles, this time not the circus but, even worse, the gladiatorial games, to which some friends duplicitously take him without his consent. Although 'he kept his eyes shut and forbade his mind to think about such fearful evils', the sounds that he hears prove too much for him and a great roar makes him 'overcome by curiosity'.[41] The narrative continues:

> As soon as he saw the blood, he at once drank in savagery and did not turn away. His eyes were riveted. He imbibed madness (*furias*). Without any awareness of what was happening to him, he found delight in the murderous contest and was inebriated by bloodthirsty pleasure. He was not now the person who had come in, but just one of the crowd which he had joined, and a true member of the group which had brought him. What should I add? He looked, he yelled, he was on fire, he took the madness (*insaniam*) home with him so that it urged him to return not only with those by whom he had originally been drawn there, but even more than them, taking others with him.[42]

The heavy censure of the shows implied in these graphic sections of the *Confessions* seems to call into question Markus's judgement that Augustine's earlier writing on this subject (within which he includes the *Confessions*) 'contain only the "mild" *topos* of the shows as "vain", "carnal" pleasures'.[43] Rather, it would appear that Augustine's condemnation of the shows' madness has deeper roots in his thinking than Markus allows. The horror at the shows' insanity that, at an early stage, Augustine had experienced in the life of his friend, is, in the *Enarrationes*, carried straight through into his preaching. And, as has been noted, the charge of insanity is not one that Augustine has suddenly invented (though he certainly does develop it), but something that was widely shared in the North African Church, both before and after him. Salvian, writing in the mid fifth century appears to take up the baton from Tertullian and Augustine, incredulously, and no doubt hyperbolically, remarking that, with

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[40] *conf.* 6.7.12.
[41] *curiositate victus*, see below.
[42] *conf.* 6.8.13.
[43] Markus (1990), 122.

vandals at the very gates of Cirta and Carthage, all the Carthaginian church could do was 'to go mad in the circus and luxuriate in the theatre'.[44]

b. Curiosity

Augustine notes in the *Confessions* that, in later life, Alypius 'was to be a presiding minister of your mystery',[45] and it seems likely that he therefore may be in the background of a passage of the *Enarrationes* in which Augustine describes how, by grace, even those enthralled by the madness of the shows are capable not only of mending their ways but attaining high office in the Church:

> We ourselves have sat there and joined in the madness (*ibi sedimus et insanivimus*); and how many may we suppose are sitting there now who in the future will be not only Christians but even bishops?[46]

Yet, clearly, as well as perhaps referring to Alypius, this passage also strikes a more directly autobiographical note, as the older Augustine recalls his own love of the shows in his younger days. In book ten of the *Confessions*, Augustine famously analyses the temptations that afflict him with reference to 1 John 2:16, 'You command me without question to abstain "from the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the ambition of the secular world"'.[47] The spectacles, as their name suggests, belong among the second of these types of lust, the *concupiscentia oculorum* and its associated sin, *curiositas*.[48] Augustine refers to the shows in two places in this book of the *Confessions*.[49]

In the first of these passages, he discusses the propensity of human beings to look at a mangled corpse if one happens to be lying around. The motive for doing such a thing is not a true intellectual quest but rather 'a lust for experimenting and knowing'. Such a lust, Augustine argues, is precisely what is provided for by the *spectacula*: 'to satisfy this diseased craving, outrageous sights are staged

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[44] *de gub. Dei*, 6.69.87: *ecclesia Carthaginiensis insaniebat in circis, luxuriebat in theatris*; cf. Chambers (1903),19.
[45] *conf.* 6.7.12. Alypius was bishop of Thagaste from AD 395-427.
[46] *en. Ps.* 147.7.
[47] *conf.* 10.29.41; cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.23.40.
[48] For further associations of the shows with *curiositas*, cf. *conf.* 1.10.16; 6.8.13.
[49] 10.35.55 and 10.35.56; surprisingly, neither of these are noted by Markus.

in public shows'.[50] In the second of the two sections, Augustine writes of life afflicted by temptation as an immense jungle full of traps and dangers but says that some of these no longer cause him the problems that once they did:

> True, theatres do not now capture my interest. I do not study to understand the transit of the stars. My soul has never sought for responses from ghosts. I detest all sacrilegious rites.[51]

Augustine's strong condemnation of *curiositas* and his invariable characterisation of it as a vice[52] is not one that is particularly easy for modern people to understand. As Torchia asks, '[w]hy would Augustine have designated this seemingly healthy disposition as a major moral pitfall and one of the chief expressions of iniquity?'[53] In answer to his own question, Torchia highlights three related fronts, epistemological, moral and metaphysical.

Epistemologically, the sin of curiosity is one that Augustine specifically associates with the materialism of his former Manichee mentors. The curious are those who, like the Manichees, 'relish earthly things and investigate spiritual questions with earthly eyes'.[54] Thus, they seek knowledge with the wrong spirit and in all of the wrong places. As Quinn writes,

> Strictures on curiosity do not entail devaluation of serious search for knowledge. Indeed... curiosity is a kind of ersatz-studiousness. The curious man, avid about garnering information, attends to idle points, of no marked concern to him. His counterpart, the authentic knowledge-seeker, does focus on what concerns him, with this decisive qualification, to the extent that such knowledge will feed his soul and thereby enrich his cultural outlook, a posture sharply divergent from that of the curious who pounces on glittering scraps calculated to 'turn him on'.[55]

Secondly, *curiositas* has a moral dimension. Although it is a 'lust of the eyes', its effects are not limited to the eyes but in fact pervade all the senses. Thus, in book six of the *Confessions*, Alypius is able to be affected by *curiositas* at the

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[50] *conf.* 10.35.55: *Ex hoc morbo cupiditatis in spectaculis exhibentur quaeque miracula.*
[51] *conf.* 10.35.56.
[52] O'Donnell (1992) 2: 150. This section draws on O'Donnell (1992); Quinn (2002); Torchia (1988), (1999).
[53] Torchia (1988), 111.
[54] *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.26.40, quoted in Torchia (1988), 114.
[55] Quinn (2002), 622.

gladiatorial games despite the fact that he has shielded his eyes from the action. As Quinn writes in his gloss on this passage, 'His ears remained open, and the frenzied roaring of the crowd over a fallen gladiator kindled the concupiscence of the eyes fascinated by the unusual and monstrous'.[56] Capable of affecting all the physical senses, *curiositas* can, through them, pervade the entire moral personality. As Torchia writes,

> The 'lust of the eyes' is associated with an appetite for the experience of temporal and corporeal images. Like every expression of lust, curiosity disrupts the soul's proper mid-rank position between God and lower bodily natures. It thereby prompts the soul to submit itself to the very things it should govern, to love what it should use for the love of God, or to become engrossed in acts proper to itself, to the neglect of universal laws common to all.[57]

Indeed, as in the case of his writing about Alypius, Augustine gives the shows a characteristic spin, by relating attendance at the shows to the psychology of habit and addiction.[58] When somebody attends the shows, they not only collude with sacrilege and paganism, but also give vivid expression to the weakness and instability of the human personality, marked by original sin.

Thirdly, curiosity has a metaphysical dimension: it diverts the soul 'from contemplation of eternal reality toward a life characterised by movement and change'.[59] It is thus intimately connected with Augustine's theory of the soul's fall, 'from the peace and stability of divine contemplation into the turbulence and restlessness of temporal existence'.[60]

The connection that Augustine clearly draws in the *Confessions* between the shows and the *concupiscentia oculorum/curiositas* is, again, one that he carries forward into his preaching in the *Enarrationes*.[61] Using his characteristic argument that Christianity will provide better shows than those on offer elsewhere, Augustine implores his congregation, 'let the person addicted to the

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[56] Quinn (2002), 315; cf. O'Donnell (1992), 2: 366.
[57] Torchia (1999), 260.
[58] Cf. Rist (1994), 175-80.
[59] Torchia (1999), 260.
[60] Torchia (1999), 260; cf. Torchia (1988), 114.
[61] Cf. Boulding (2000-4) 2: 203, n.19; 4: 166, n.47.

shows be led away from that gratification of the eyes (*a curiositate*), and in our company seek better and more profitable sights, which will give him joy when he discovers them'.[62] Again, preaching on Ps. 80:16, *The Lord's enemies have lied to him*, Augustine considers a theme already familiar, the incompatibility of attendance at the shows with Christian baptismal identity:

> The Lord's enemies have lied to him. Do you renounce your sins? 'I do renounce them,' someone asserts. And back he goes to what he has renounced. What are these things you renounce? Theft, robbery, perjury, homicide, adultery, sacrilege, impious rites, the seductions of the eyes (*furtis, rapinis, perjuriis, homicidiis, adulteriis, sacrilegiis, sacris abominandis, curiositatibus*). You renounce all these but then you crane your head round again and are overcome by them. The things you turn back to now are worse than before. The dog returns to his own vomit, and the sow newly washed rolls in the mud once more.[63]

It is significant that in this passage from the *Enarrationes*, Augustine links *curiositas* together with sacrilegious rites and impiety. O'Donnell comments that '[w]hen we bring our modern incomprehension to Augustine's disdain for what is now an unquestioned virtue, we forget that for him *curiositas* led directly to demons'.[64] This also seems to call into question Markus's analysis of the passage from the second book of *De Doctrina Christiana* that was referred to earlier in this chapter. In it, Augustine analyses signs in three different categories:

1. Signs that have been agreed upon through a common language with demons[65]
2. Humanly instituted signs that are superfluous and extravagant luxuries[66]
3. Humanly instituted signs that are useful and necessary[67]

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[62] *en. Ps.* 39.10.
[63] *en. Ps.* 80.19.
[64] O'Donnell (1992) 2: 151. In particular, O'Donnell quotes *cat.rud.* 25.48, *qui christianum nomen oderunt...et adhuc simulacris et daemoniorum curisositatibus servire desiderant*, and *Io. eu. tr.*2.13 (on 1 Jn. 2:16), *iam quam late patet curiositas? ipsa in spectaculis, in theatris, in sacramentis diaboli, in magicis artibus, in maleficiis ipsa est curiositas*; cf. O'Donnell (2005), 192-5.
[65] *doc. chr.* 2.24.37.
[66] *doc. chr.* 2.25.38-9.
[67] *doc. chr.* 2.25.39-40.

Having accepted that Augustine places the theatre in the second of the three categories, Markus speculates that it might be true to his underlying thought to place other types of spectacles, which are not explicitly mentioned, such as the circus and the hippodrome, into the third (useful and necessary) category of signs. However, as Augustine says in the same passage of *De Doctrina*, the common denominator of signs instituted by demons is that 'they are brimful of dangerous *curiosity*, agonising worry and deadly bondage.'[68] In view of the demonic and sacrilegious associations of *curiositas*, it therefore seems that Augustine might indeed, if pressed, have placed the amusements of the circus in the first category of signs – those directly associated with sacrilege and communication with demons. This is certainly where he was to place them within a few years, when he came to write *De catechizandis rudibus*,[69] and it is also, of course, the category in which Tertullian would have put them.

A final comment on this theme would be that *curiositas* is not the only one of the threefold temptations of book ten of the *Confessions* that the shows encourage and embody. This is particularly noticeable in Augustine's portrayal of the evergetes who give money to put on the entertainments. Augustine compares the financial losses suffered by the evergetes with the spiritual losses sustained by those who attend the shows: '[t]he donors empty their treasure chests of gold, but the spectators find their hearts emptied of righteousness.'[70] Lepelley observes that the cornerstone of Augustine's attack on the evergetes is the supposedly self-interested nature of their giving, which Augustine routinely, if perhaps unfairly, contrasts with the disinterested practice of Christian charity:[71]

> ...the glory of fools, that which passes for glory in popular estimation, though tempting, is deceptive. One who is lured toward it feels that somehow, in the eyes of some at least, he must

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[68] *doc. chr.* 2.25.38: *plena sunt omnia pestiferae curiositatis...*
[69] Cf. *cat. rud.* 7.11; 25.48. Augustine's list in *cat. rud.* 7.11 of those who might lead a new Christian astray, 'drunkards, misers, cheats, gamblers, adulterers, fornicators, lovers of entertainments, healers using sacrilegious amulets, chanters of spells, astrologers, or soothsayers' appears to be inspired up until the mention of fornicators by 1 Cor. 5:10-11 and 6:9-10 (cf. Canning [2006], 78, n. 78). The remaining groups are added by Augustine himself to the list and may indicate that love of entertainments and sacrilege are closely grouped together in his mind.
[70] *en. Ps.* 147.7: *illorum arca auro exinanitur, istorum pectus justitiae divitiis exspoliatur*; cf. 147.12.
[71] Lepelley (1979) 382-3.

become famous. This drives people into madness: they are puffed up with self-importance, empty within and pretentious in their bearing. They even want to waste their money by hiring players, actors, gladiators, charioteers. What fortunes they squander! What sums they spend! They pour out all their resources, not only those they inherited but also those of mind and spirit. They care nothing for a poor person, because the populace is not shouting to be given a pauper but is yelling that it wants a gladiator. Celebrity-seekers are unwilling to hand out money where they will not be acclaimed for it, but where they are acclaimed by frantic crowds they become crazed themselves.[72]

Augustine's criticism of the evergetes focuses on the way in which they use their wealth to gain status in the world. If the spectators' besetting sin is the lust of the eyes, then that of the evergetes is the ambition of the secular world.[73]

Moreover, the sexual immorality and other forms of physical debauchery that Augustine associates with the shows[74] gives them a perhaps unique genius for combining all three forms of temptation. This is reflected in Augustine's comments on Ps. 30:24, *Choose the Lord for your love, all you who are his saints*, where a linkage between the attractions of the shows and the threefold temptations (italicised and placed in brackets) seems to lie just below the surface of Augustine's remarks:

> To whom could I say, 'Choose the Lord for your love,' if they are still choosing to love the amphitheatre? Whom could I invite to choose the Lord for their love if they are still choosing to set their love on farce, or on the pantomime (=*concupiscentia oculorum*), or on excessive drinking (=*concupiscentia carnis* [Cf. *conf.* 10.31.45]), or if they still choose worldly ostentation (*pompas saeculi*) as their love (=*ambitio saeculi*), or the whole gamut of empty shows and deceptive trumperies? I could say it only to someone to whom I could also say, 'unlearn your love of these things, that you may truly learn love...'[75]

c. Mendacity

On a number of occasions, the charge of insanity levelled against the shows is linked to a further one of lying. A favourite verse in this respect is Ps. 39:5 (411-5), *Blessed is the one whose hope is in the Lord, who has no regard for empty*

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[72] *en. Ps.* 149.13; cf. 147.12.
[73] Cf. *conf.* 10.36.59 – 40.65.
[74] Cf. Lepelley (1979), 377; Chadwick (1991), 36, n. 3. For Tertullian, the theatre is impurity's 'peculiar home'; cf. *spect.* 17.
[75] *en. Ps.* 30.4.11.

things and lying foolishness. Augustine asks, 'why are these insane pursuits called "lying"? Because insanity does tell lies while soundness of mind is truthful (*insania mendax; sanitas verax*).'[76] Again, he asks,

> Who among them will not call us spoilsports? Because we do not share their frenzy (*insanias*) they think we are missing their intense and manifold pleasures, in which they themselves are losing their minds, and they fail to see that these things are deceptive (*mendaces*).[77]

The same verse is again deployed in his exposition of Ps. 50, when it appears that attendance at the shows had kept some people away from church. Augustine, underlining, in the manner of Tertullian, the incompatibility of the shows with Christian baptism, laments,

> How many of our brothers and sisters are in our minds today, as we sorrowfully watch them running off after empty things and lying foolishness (*vanitates et insanias mendaces*), careless of their primary vocation?[78]

In associating the theatre with lies, Augustine is able to draw on some deep roots in what one historian of the theatre describes as the Judaeo-Christian tradition's 'prejudice against disguisings'[79] expressed in, for example, the strict prohibition of transvestitism in Deuteronomy 22:5. The point is trenchantly re-enforced by Tertullian: 'the Author of truth does not love anything deceitful; all that is counterfeit is a kind of adultery in his eyes'. [80] Indeed, Augustine's North African forebear even sees shaving of the beard as a form of dissimulation: 'will God be pleased with a man who alters his features with a razor, belying his own countenance...?'[81]

Augustine's own opposition to lying in all its forms, stated in both early and later works, is clearly stated in a number of his works: 'everyone who tells a lie is

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[76] *en. Ps.* 39.8.
[77] *en. Ps.* 39.8; on the general point on the need for preaching to orient the wills of members of the congregation towards God, rather than the shows, cf. Boulding (2000-4), 1: 356, n. 15: 'Throughout this paragraph Augustine uses the verb *diligo* for "love", a verb connoting more of choice, esteem and value than the more common *amo*.'
[78] *en. Ps.* 50.1.
[79] Chambers (1903), 1; cf. *doc. chr.* 4.21.49-50..
[80] *spect.* 23: *non amat falsum auctor veritatis; adulterium est apud illum omne quod fingitur.*
[81] *spect.* 23.

committing iniquity'.[82] In his two treatises on the subject, *De mendacio* (395) and *Contra mendacium* (420), he categorically rejects all forms of deception except the jocose lie as immoral and reprehensible.[83] In the *Enarrationes* themselves, the charge of lying is seen to have particularly grave associations in the exposition of Ps. 102:2,[84] *What return shall I make to the Lord for all the repayment he has made to me?* Here, Augustine urges his congregation,

> Make truth your repayment, and praise the Lord in truth. If you try to speak from yourself, you will be lying. One who tells lies speaks from what is his own (*qui loquitur mendacium, de suo loquitur*) (Jn 8:44). Anyone who lies is speaking from himself, but anyone who speaks the truth is speaking from what belongs to God.[85]

O'Donovan questions the basis of Augustine's exegesis of Jn. 8:44, on the grounds that Jesus's words, 'when he lies he speaks according to his own nature', which are specifically about the devil, appear in Augustine's Latin version of the New Testament as a generalisation. However, O'Donovan points out the far-reaching implications of Augustine's (mis?)interpretation. For, as was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the sin of lying is linked with the love of self and pursuit of private goods that were to feature prominently in *City of God*, and which characterise the primal sin of Adam and Eve:

> ...one who tells lies speaks from what is his own. The wretched humans who listened to him forsook the common provision which was the source of their blessedness. They were led away from it to what was their own, perversely trying to be like God.[86]

The charge then that the shows, in particular the theatre, peddle lies is a very serious one, with deep resonances throughout Augustine's thought. For, although the fullness of truth, like God himself, is something that it is impossible for fallen human beings fully to grasp in the present, yet, to the extent that they can grasp

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[82] Especially, *doc. chr.* 1.36.40; cf. *De mendacio* (395); *Contra mendacium* (420); *ench.* 18 & 22. See Ramsey (1985) and (1993), 7-8, for a discussion of Augustine's attitude to lying and contrast between his strictness and the comparative leniency of some other church Fathers.
[83] Cf. Ramsey (1993), 7.
[84] Preached in Carthage, c. 411; cf. Boulding (2000-4), 5: 78, n. 1.
[85] *en. Ps.* 102.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 38.4; 91.6; *conf.* 12.25.34.
[86] *en. Ps.* 103.2.11; cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 16.23-4; Boulding (1997), 333, n. 89; Markus (1997), 395-6; O'Donovan (1980), 104.

it, it exerts an absolute claim upon them.[87] Moreover, the shows, by dealing in lies, defy Christ himself whom, following Jn. 14:6, Augustine closely identifies with truth: 'O Truth, is there any road where you have not walked with me, teaching me what to avoid and what to aim at, whenever I referred to you the paltry insights I had managed to attain, and sought your guidance?'[88]

Again, it is in the *Confessions* that the *Enarrationes*' charge that the shows peddle lies is given further content. In some of the early books of the *Confessions*, Augustine explores his own early love of the theatre which, as O'Donnell points out, seems to have exerted an equivalent hold over him to that exerted by the circus and amphitheatre over the youthful Alypius.[89] The defining characteristic of his youthful passion for the theatre as he recounts it in book three seems precisely to be a perverse love of what was false:

> ...what quality of mercy is it in fictitious and theatrical inventions? A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but invited only to grieve. The greater his pain, the greater his approval of the actor in these representations. If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so presented that the theatregoer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself.[90]

The theatre thus creates, as it were, a topsy-turvy world: '[t]heatre-goers draw pleasure from psychic pain; in sorrow lies their joy'.[91] Such entertainments create a bogus compassion, which is powerful as an emotion, but false in that the person who feels it is not, as hopefully he or she normally would be, inspired to come to the help of the person who is afflicted. The theatre inverts the natural human emotions: people actually want to feel pain and are disappointed if they are unable to do so:[92]

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[87] *mend.* 40; cf. Ramsey (1985), 511.
[88] *conf.* 10.40.65; cf. 3.6.10; 7.10.16; 10.40.62; 12.25.35; *Io. eu. tr.* 26.5. O'Donnell (1999), 2: 238-9: 'Passages in *conf.* where *veritas* is used in a way that demonstrates, or clearly corroborates, the thesis that the word "means" Christ, that is, that in using the word "veritas", Augustine thinks, and expects his readers to think, of a denotation identical with the second person of the trinity.'
[89] Cf. O'Donnell (1999), 2: 365.
[90] *conf.* 3.2.3.
[91] Quinn (2002), 124.
[92] Cf. Chadwick (1991), 36, n.3; Quinn (2002), 125.

Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? Only, when he himself suffers, it is called misery; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy.

In the light of this, it seems necessary to question Markus's assessment that Augustine's youthful love of the theatre came to be 'toned down'. The dishonesty and lies that these experiences represent is one that Augustine fundamentally repudiates, every bit as strongly as he repudiates the Manichaeism with which he associates that period of his life in which the shows exerted a particular fascination for him.[93]

d. Rivalry

The hero of a David Lodge novel expresses the opinion that,

> ...going to church was like going to the cinema: you sat in rows, the notices were like trailers, the supporting sermon was changed weekly. And people went because they always went.[94]

Some similar comments seem to be invited by the relationships between some of the *Enarrationes* and the *spectacula* in the city of Carthage. In the *Enarrationes*, most of the references Augustine makes to the shows occur in sermons preached in Carthage, where shows of various kinds were a particularly prominent feature of municipal life. La Bonnardière highlights a variety of their distinctive features.[95] Augustine's visits to Carthage tended to coincide with important events in the life of the city such as vigils of Cyprian, meetings of the full council of bishops, crucial moments in the Donatist or Pelagian controversies or, of interest in this context, the celebration of pagan festivities with accompanying games and shows. Augustine would not have presided at the eucharist in Carthage, since Aurelius was bishop of the city and so the sermons he preaches there are probably not integrated into the eucharistic celebration; a view that is

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[93] Cf. *conf.* 4.1.1.
[94] David Lodge (1960), *The Picturegoers*, (London: MacGibbon and Kee), 108.
[95] La Bonnardière (1976). La Bonnardière discusses in particular *en. Pss.* 147, 103, 80, 146, 102, 57, 66.

re-enforced by the considerable length of many of them. Such sermons would, most likely, have been preached during the course of a day, generally a weekday, using texts that Augustine, untrammelled by the constraints of the lectionary, would have been free to select for himself in accordance with his current preoccupations. As a result, when Augustine preaches on the shows, his sermons themselves often appear, like the shows, to be occasional, high-profile, performance-like set-pieces. They are an alternative entertainment for the people of Carthage on 'Babylon's high days'.[96]

And the similarities do not end there: Augustine's expositions of the psalms could be thought to mirror exhibitions and theatrical displays themselves, since, like their counter-attractions, their stock in trade is, in a certain sense, the veiling and unveiling of realities. Indeed, O'Donnell, writing about Augustine's preaching technique in the *Enarrationes*, describes his sermons as 'crowd pleasers', comparing them with murder mysteries, or, somewhat curiously, 'an old fashioned striptease'.[97] In one sermon, Augustine himself, 'with deliberate showmanship',[98] almost seems to beg this comparison, as he appears as an exhibitor, spreading out delights for his spectators:

> We promised you that today would be a day for something worth looking at, for a divine exhibition, so to say. Think of it this way: the verses of the psalm which have been proclaimed but not yet expounded are like tightly-wrapped parcels that we have brought along from the divine giver. They are presented to us wrapped up in order that your eagerness may be aroused as the wrappings are being removed. But you must prepare yourselves not merely to look on but also to clothe yourselves in the contents.[99]

The business of the theatre, with its carefully crafted dissimulations is, on the surface at any rate, close to that of allegory in which 'one meaning seems to be conveyed by the words, and a different meaning is symbolized for our minds'.[100] Like the theatre, Scripture may appear to hide the truth: Christ is called a lion, yet he is not a wild beast; a rock, but he is not hard; a mountain, but he is not an

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[96] Cf. *en. Ps.* 61.10; 50.1.
[97] Cf. O'Donnell (2005), 130-2.
[98] Brown (1967), 314.
[99] *en. Ps.* 147.2; cf. 57.7.
[100] *en. Ps.* 103.1.13.

area of raised earth.[101] To a citizen of Carthage or Hippo, able to be enthusiastic. despite the strictures of the bishops, about both going to the theatre and listening to sermons, it is perhaps possible to see how the boundary line between these rival entertainments might have become blurred.[102] In view of such unfortunate possible associations, Augustine is compelled to work hard to ensure that his congregation should keep scriptural allegories and theatrical lies quite separate in their minds. He warns,

> Be careful not to seize on the mention of allegory and think I am talking about music and dancing on the stage (*ne putetis nominata allegoria, pantomimi aliquid me dixisse*). There are some words that are in common use both among us and in frivolous theatrical circles, including disreputable ones; they are only words, after all, sounds made with the tongue.[103]

For Augustine, as has already been argued, the fundamental difference between the shows and the theatre is, as has already been argued, that the veilings and unveilings of the sermon exist ultimately to serve the truth while those of the theatre and other shows do the opposite. The figures and allegories that are used in Scripture and in preaching enable people to see the truth more clearly. They make the truth attractive and draw them towards it.[104] When this happens, the truth becomes something that they are able to live by, in the words of the exposition quoted above, to clothe themselves in. And this is the very opposite of what is provided by actors in the theatre who, far from leading people towards the truth, might justifiably say in the words of Peter Mandelson that 'our job is to create the truth'. [105] Their lies and deceptions lead their audiences away from the truth, disorienting them both morally and emotionally, making them happy to be miserable, firing them up with counterfeit emotions on behalf of actors who are not really suffering and about whom, in reality, they care nothing.

And yet, for all that Augustine distances his sermons from theatrical entertainments, strong similarities between the two rival attractions do indeed

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[101] Cf. *en. Ps.* 103.1.13.
[102] Obviously, this does take some imagination!
[103] *en. Ps.* 103.1.13.
[104] Cf. Harrison (1992), 66-9.
[105] Quoted in Peter Oborne (2005), *The Rise of Political Lying* (London: Simon & Schuster). 3.

exist. He has renounced all that the theatre stands for, and yet his preaching displays many signs of being deeply indebted to dramatic methods. The fact that the vast majority of the *Enarrationes* are indeed pieces of live performance is integral and not incidental to them. As in theatrical performances, the performer carefully chooses language that will excite particular emotions in the audience: 'Listen to him [David] crying out, and cry out with him; listen to him groaning, and groan too; listen to him weeping and add your tears to his; listen to him corrected and share his joy.'[106] As with actors and audience in theatrical performances, preacher and congregation interact in the preaching of the Psalms: 'Try your hardest along with me, and let us see if we can understand'.[107]

Most of all, perhaps, the theatre gives a sense of corporate identity to those who attend: it forms them into a body. Those who love the same charioteer, hunter or actor experience a powerful bond of association between them.[108] And it is also this quality that Augustine seeks to engender by his preaching. McCarthy writes,

> For Augustine...the oral 'exegesis' of Scripture, unlike the scholarly productions of later history, constituted an event that he will often compare with the spectacles taking place outside his basilica. If practitioners of the historical-critical method may, for their own purposes, appropriately beware of the rhetorical virtuosity of one such as Augustine, the theologian may by no means discount the modality in which Scripture and its exegesis is communicated among late ancient Christians. Not only does the ecclesial performance of Augustine and his congregation frame his exegesis, but the practice of that exegesis itself forms an *ecclesia* in a way that is theologically significant... Augustine's actual practice of interpreting the psalms with his community...'makes' the Church: it generates the *ecclesia* at a distinct historical moment.[109]

Moreover, this has a particular relevance in relation to the Psalms, since, for Augustine, they have many of the same properties that drama has. For the Psalms themselves, as was discussed in the previous chapter, also enable members of the ecclesial body to participate in what is said and done by Christ, its head. They too, as Augustine understands them, are able to involve their audience; to draw them into the saving mysteries that they describe: 'if the psalm

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[106] *en. Ps.* 50.5.
[107] *en. Ps.* 61.17.
[108] *Cf. cat. rud.* 25.49.
[109] McCarthy (2005), 25.

prays, you pray; if it laments, you lament...'[110] They too involve their audience in the action and form its members into a community.

The particular danger, then, of shows of all kinds resides precisely in their ability to involve their audience and form them as a community, in other words, to create a 'para-Church', in competition with the Catholic Church. Augustine is strongly aware of the ability of fallen human beings to associate in pernicious ways. As he says recounting the incident of the pears in the *Confessions*, 'I would not have done it alone; I most certainly would not have done it alone'.[111] Indeed, in the influential theology of Tyconius, it is not only Christ but also the devil who is capable of having a corporate identity.[112] Performances of all kinds, whether preaching or otherwise, can indeed bring about what Markus describes as a 'cohesion of wills'[113] but, when wrongly directed, this can be a terrifying phenomenon, as it is when Alypius's identity is, for a while, completely submerged in that of the insane crowd at the gladiatorial combat.

To summarise, it has been argued so far that Augustine's attitude to the *spectacula* from the time of his conversion onwards was probably never, in Markus's words, 'conciliatory', 'easy-going' or 'mild'. Moreover, such hostility, far from being rooted in an abrupt change of mind in the late 390s, is thoroughly entrenched in many aspects of his thought. In common with his North African forebears, he sees the shows as having inescapably pagan origins that are entirely at odds with the Christian faith.[114] To this inherited set of convictions, he brings three more related charges, all of which are characteristic of his own distinctive approach. Psychologically, the shows are capable of devouring the personality, fostering vicious and uncontrollable habits and addictions. Morally, they instantiate some of the most serious sins: curiosity and mendacity. Ecclesiologically, they seek to set up a bond of association that competes and conflicts with the bond provided by Christ to members of the Church.

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[110] *en. Ps.* 30.2.3.1; cf. Cameron (1999), 293.
[111] *conf.* 2.8.16: *...solus id non fecissem...solus omnino id non fecissem.*
[112] Cf. *Lib. Reg.* 7: *de diabolo et corpore eius.*
[113] Cf. Markus (1990), 121.
[114] Cf. *doc. chr.* 2.17.27.

On a personal level, it seems clear that the violence and immodesty of the shows sets them in obvious antithesis to the chaste and dignified Lady Continence whom Augustine has embraced at the time of his conversion.[115] 'By continence the scattered elements of the self are collected and brought back into the unity from which we have slid away into dispersion':[116] what could embody such dispersion more completely than an addiction to games and theatrical performances?

2. Solutions to the problem

a. True solution: The practice of love

At the end of his exposition of Psalm 50 (411?), Augustine seems to call for a sense of perspective to be retained about the actions of those who, that same day, had gone to the circus rather than come to hear him preach:

> It remains for me to say a few words to you, brothers and sisters, in view of the rampant evils (*multa mala*: circus entertainments in this context) among which we live. As long as we must live in these human circumstances, there is no escaping from them. We must live tolerantly (*cum tolerantia*) among bad people, because when we were bad ourselves, good people lived tolerantly among us. If we remember what we were, we shall not despair of those who are now what we were then.[117]

It has been argued so far in this chapter that Augustine's dislike of the shows has deep roots in the North African tradition from which he comes, in his reflections upon his own life, and in his theological thought more generally. The question that should perhaps then be asked is why, given that this is the case, Augustine, though invariably condemnatory, is indeed relatively restrained in his preaching on the subject of the shows; why he is not, as Van der Meer notes, prone to thunder in the grand style of Tertullian or Salvian. The answer, perhaps, as indicated in the passage above, is that given the nature of human society, the Church, and individual men and women, Augustine is simply not surprised that

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[115] Cf. *conf.* 8.11.27.
[116] *conf.* 10.29.40.
[117] *en. Ps.* 50.24.

they should act in foolish and harmful ways and that it does little good to rail against them.

To make what is perhaps a somewhat obvious point, so far as the Church is concerned, Augustine accepts Tyconius's perception[118] that the Church is a bipartite (or as Augustine prefers to say 'mixed'[119]) body which has both a left and a right side. In view of the fact that 'in all the scriptures, the Lord gives testimony that the one body of Abraham's line, in every case, both grows and flourishes and goes to ruin',[120] it can hardly be surprising that those who comprise the Christian Church show radically different orientations when it comes to the shows. As Augustine often reiterates, in the *Enarrationes* and elsewhere, the separation of the true and mixed bodies – the sheep from the goats – the wheat from the darnel, awaits the eschatological future and it is presumably to be entirely expected that the different groups behave, for the present, in very different ways. Thus, for the moment, difficult as this may seem to those who are contemplating joining the Church,[121] it is necessary to live tolerantly among bad people.

Moreover, for Augustine, unlike Tyconius, this fundamental distinction between persons can be seen to extend into the psychological makeup of individuals themselves. Commenting on Ps. 96:3 (399?), *Fire will go before him, to burn up his enemies on every side*, Augustine speculates that the fire that goes before God cannot be the fire of final judgment, since this will come after Christ's (second) coming. Rather, the fire that goes before him, identified with the Holy Spirit, is a fire which, prior to the eschatological separation *between* individuals, effects a separation *inside* them, burning away what is bad and leaving what is good:

> Faith is gold, and carnal concupiscence is straw, for, as Isaiah says, *all flesh is but grass, and human glory like the flower of grass* (Is 40:6). It is clear from this that whatever in a carnal person craves for empty, worldly things is mere straw. What crowds have gone to the theatre!

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[118] *Lib. Reg.* 2: *De Domini corpore bipertito.*
[119] *doc. chr.* 3.32.45.
[120] *Lib. Reg.* 2.
[121] Cf. *cat. rud.* 7.11.

And perhaps some of our own brethren among them. It was their straw that drove them there. Should we not hope for their sake that this fire will fall upon them, to burn away their straw and purge the gold? There may be some faith in them, but it is smothered by straw. It would be good for them to burn in the holy fire, so that the straw may be consumed, and the precious metal Christ redeemed may shine out gloriously.[122]

The radically mixed and conflicted nature of human beings themselves harks back to book ten of the *Confessions*, which, it has already been argued, is central to the issues discussed here. Human beings live in a state of perpetual temptation. The lusts of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the ambition of the secular world are all around and exert a pervasive and far-reaching hold on sinful men and women. God's grace is needed for them to have any chance of obeying the commandments. They are straw mixed with gold. That fallen human beings should make fundamentally wrong choices, such as a decision to attend the shows, is only to be expected. Luckily God is able to forgive sinners and turn their lives around, but the means by which God's grace will operate are not words of despair or angry ranting but the necessarily slow and laborious work of enabling them to re-direct their love towards a better and worthier object.

Love is thus central both to the pastoral problems presented by the shows and to the possible solution of these problems. It is central to the problem because it is love, albeit a love that seems to Augustine to be totally misguided, that motivates them to go to the shows in the first place. Augustine appreciates the strong hold that the shows have on people's loves and affections, as Lepelley puts it, 'the fact that they bring together enormous crowds and exert an incomparable fascination upon them'.[123] Echoing some themes that have already been discussed, Brown writes suggestively of the way in which the *spectacula* are able to engender a strong sense of corporate identity precisely because they are loved:

...the atmosphere of the Roman circuses, with their amazing manifestations of mob-psychology, is never far from Augustine's discussion of the motives of human groups. It hits upon a fundamental motive: *dilectio*, which, for Augustine, stands for the orientation of the whole

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[122] *en. Ps.* 96.7; cf. 61.7.
[123] Lepelley (1979), 377.

personality, its deepest wishes and its basic capacity to love, and so it is far from being limited to purely rational pursuit of ends.[124]

As has already been argued, the fact that a particular object of love draws a group of people together cannot be taken to imply any approval of the object itself. As Augustine says in *City of God*,

...if we are to discover the character of any people, we have only to examine what it loves... Clearly, however, the better the objects of this agreement, the better the people; and the worse the objects, the worse the people.[125]

If, as in the case of the spectacles, or indeed gangs of robbers,[126] the object of love is thoroughly flawed, then there can be little merit in the association of people that forms around it.

However, the fact remains that it is love, albeit a misdirected, misguided and fundamentally self-seeking love,[127] that has brought this association into being and it is only love for something different that, ultimately, is capable of forming a new people, united not by love of the shows but by love of God and hope for the eternal Jerusalem. Just as love is central to the problem, love must also be central to the solution. Thus, in the passages of the *Enarrationes* in which he mentions the shows, Augustine's pastoral approach seems clear and consistent: those who love the shows must be persuaded that an object of love exists that is more worthwhile, more lovable, more beautiful than anything that could be provided by the shows.[128] Human love can never be static: it always moves one way or the other[129] and it is the task of the preacher to enable his audience to move, by love, in the right direction:

...when human hearts are transfixed by the arrows of God's word, the effect is not death but the arousal of love. The Lord is a skilled marksman with his eye on love, and no one shoots more accurately at love than he who shoots with the word. He shoots at his lover's heart for the good

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[124] Brown (1972), 42.
[125] *ciu.* 19.24.
[126] Cf. *ciu.* 4.4.
[127] Cf. *en. Ps.* 102.13; *doc. chr.* 1.29.30.
[128] Cf. Markus (1990), 118.
[129] Cf. *en. Ps.* 122.1.

of the lover; he shoots to turn you into his lover. We shoot with arrows when we deal in words.[130]

In his attempt to do this, Augustine is, again, able to draw on the work of Tertullian who, in a passage near the end of *De Spectaculis*, seems to set the scene for Augustine's approach by suggesting to his readers that Christianity is, bluntly speaking, the best show in town. Any interest or entertainment that the shows are able to provide can be improved upon by the Church:

To trample under foot the gods of the heathen, to drive out demons, to effect cures, to seek revelations, to live unto God – these are the pleasures, these are the spectacles of the Christians, holy, everlasting and free of charge. In these find your circus games... If the literary accomplishments of the stage delight you, we have sufficient literature of our own, enough verses and maxims, also enough songs and melodies; and ours are not fables, but truths, not artful devices, but plain realities. Do you want contests in boxing and wrestling? Here they are – contests of no slight account, and plenty of them. Behold impurity overthrown by chastity, faithlessness slain by faith, cruelty crushed by mercy, impudence put in the shade by modesty. Such are the contests among us, and in these we win our crowns. Do you have desire for blood, too? You have the blood of Christ.[131]

In his assertion of the superiority of Christian shows over those of the pagans, Augustine appears to take this rhetoric from Tertullian: 'the pagans must not think that, while they have shows, we have none'.[132] His comments, for example, on Ps. 39:6, *You have wrought many wondrous deeds, O Lord my God*, appear to contain some strong Tertullianic echoes:

He used to watch prodigies performed by human beings, let him now watch God's wondrous deeds. Many are the wondrous feats of the Lord, so let him look at them. Why did they ever become worthless in his eyes? He applauds the charioteer who controls four horses which run their course without slipping or stumbling; but has the Lord not performed feats just as wonderful in the spiritual sphere? Let him control licentiousness, let him control cowardice, control injustice, control rashness; let him I mean control the passions which, when they fall into excess, produce these vices.[133]

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[130] *en. Ps.* 119.5.
[131] *spect.* 29.
[132] *en. Ps.* 147.8.
[133] *en. Ps.* 39.9.

However, Augustine brings to this rhetoric of the Christian shows' superiority a new psychological dimension which is lacking in Tertullian's polemic. Augustine's over-riding emphasis is on the capacity of God's *spectacula* to delight, to bring joy to those who experience them. 'God', he tells the people of Carthage, 'has put on for you in Christ's name entertainments that have gripped your imagination and held you spellbound'.[134] 'Those who delight in listening to a musical instrument may find even more delight in hearkening to God's voice.'[135] Those who look at the shows that God puts on will find 'much more profitable and more beautiful spectacles. Let us keep our eyes on beautiful things and let ourselves be watched by the One who is beautiful.'[136] Grace has the ability to bring about a moral renaissance in human beings by drawing them to new delights which are powerful enough to break the hold of ingrained habits, and change established patterns of behaviour:

> As you confess your sins to him you will deserve to receive delight from him in return; and he will accord to you sweetness in acting righteously. In consequence, you who formerly took pleasure in sin will now begin to delight in righteousness... You found gratification in shows but now in prayer; worthless and bawdy songs used to afford you pleasure, but now you enjoy singing a hymn to God; you were wont to run to the theatre, but now you hasten to church.[137]

The shows of the amphitheatre, the circus and the theatre are, indeed, loved and enjoyed by those who attend them. In order to stop people attending, they must become convinced that greater enjoyment is to be found elsewhere, that another object of love exists which is more worthy of their affections,

> Does anyone live without enjoyment (*sine affectionibus*)? And do you suppose, my brothers and sisters, that people who fear God, worship God, love God, get no enjoyment out of it? Do you really think, will you dare to think, that while gaming-board, theatre, hunting, fowling and fishing yield enjoyment, the works of God yield none? Can you doubt that meditation on God affords enjoyment of its own, when people contemplate the natural world, and nature's profusion is displayed before their eyes, and they seek the artist in his work, and find him who is displeasing in no place whatever, but pleasing above all else?[138]

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[134] *en. Ps.* 80.23.
[135] *en. Ps.* 98.5.
[136] *en. Ps.* 32.3.25.
[137] *en. Ps.* 84.15.
[138] *en. Ps.* 76.14.

As a number of these passages indicate, the pastoral strategy of asserting the superior claims of God's *spectacula* over others that may be available is, for Augustine, rooted in the way that God has made the world to be. It is not simply an arbitrary opinion that God is more enjoyable than the shows. For, since God has created the world, his ability to evoke delight must necessarily be greater than that of any created being. As O'Donovan writes, love has, for Augustine, a strongly rational dimension, knowledge and love form a unity: 'there is', he writes, 'an objective measure by which we may differentiate "better" from "worse" loves, which is the adequacy of their grasp of reality'.[139] When men and women love the shows of God more than they love the municipal shows, they go with the grain of created reality:

> Let our God be our hope. He who made all things is better than all things; he who made beautiful things is more beautiful than all of them; he who made all that is strong is himself stronger; he who made all greatness is greater than any. Whatever you have loved, he will be that for you. Learn to love the Creator in the creature, the Maker in what is made. Do not let something he has made so captivate you that you lose him by whom you were made yourself.[140]

It is perhaps in his exposition of Psalm 32 that Augustine articulates most clearly the pastoral thought that seems to underlie his teaching about the shows. Commenting on Ps. 32:2, *Confess to God on the lyre, and sing psalms to him with the ten-stringed psaltery*, Augustine characteristically distances the psalm from the musical instruments of the theatre.[141] The lyre he relates to earthly goods, the psaltery to higher goods and, in particular, to the commandments (its ten strings). Of our ability to obey the commandments, he significantly says that,

> You will fulfill through love what was beyond your powers through fear. A person who refrains from a bad action out of fear would really like to do it, if it were allowed; so even if the possibility of carrying it out is absent, the person's will is attached to the bad deed. 'I'm not doing it,' he or she will say. Why not? 'Because I'm afraid to'. Then you do not yet love righteousness, you are still a slave. Become a son or a daughter. Nonetheless a good slave may

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[139] O'Donovan (2002), 23; cf. O'Donovan (1980), 19-32.
[140] *en. Ps.* 39.8.
[141] *en. Ps.* 32.2.5.

become a good son or daughter, so go on refraining from sin out of fear, and you will gradually learn to refrain also out of love, for there is beauty in righteousness. Let the fear of punishment deter you; but righteousness has its own fair character; it catches the eye and sets its lovers on fire.[142]

Ultimately, it is crucial that, if men and women are truly to do the good, this must come about through their being united to that good in love.[143] All human beings are and must be lovers. Indeed, the martyrs were the greatest lovers of all[144] and it is necessary to be a lover, since 'whoever does not love freezes, becomes stiff'.[145] Thus, Augustine's pastoral objectives would not be fulfilled simply if people were to start hating the shows. Love must continue to be the driving force in their lives, but their love must start to find in God its true, and therefore most truly delightful, object. Markus quotes the view of Augustine's disciple Quodvultdeus, that people should 'divert their passion for the spectacles, not give it up'.[146] Similarly, but in a different context, Augustine himself tells his congregation, 'Purify this love...divert on to your garden the water that is going down the drain, let the current that drove you into the arms of the world be redirected to the world's Maker'.[147]

So what precisely are the Christian *spectacula* that are able to work so powerfully upon fallen human beings in this way? What are the shows that God puts on that are capable of conveying God's irresistible grace by drawing the eyes of the spectators away from the false delights of curiosity and towards the true object of delight, love and enjoyment? Like the shows provided by the Roman Empire, it seems that the Christian shows take a variety of forms, and, although some of these have already been mentioned, it is perhaps helpful to try and identify a specific list.

In the first place, and most obviously, it is the **verbal artistry of Scripture** that must start to attract the eyes: 'let us gaze with the eyes of our minds at what is

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[142] *en. Ps.* 32.2.6.
[143] This point will be covered in more detail in ch. 4.
[144] *en. Ps.* 32.2.6; cf. *en. Ps.* 39.16.
[145] *en. Ps.* 32.2.6: *qui non amat friguit obriguit.*
[146] *Sermo* 3.2, quoted in Markus (1990), 118, n. 41.
[147] *en. Ps.* 31.2.5: *Purga ergo amorem tuum: aquam fluentem in cloacam, converte ad hortum: quales impetus habebat ad mundum, tales habeat ad artificem mundi.*

conveyed by the various senses of the divine scriptures and rejoice at the sight',[148] and, accompanying Scripture, the persuasive and delightful speakers who, by their own artistry, can draw out the delights that Scripture contains.[149]

In parallel with the Scriptures, **the Christian liturgy** itself is one of God's supreme entertainments. In a frequently-quoted passage, Augustine presses the superior claims of attendance at the Eucharist to the next day's entertainments:

> We invite you to come along tomorrow as well, dearly beloved. Tomorrow at the theatre they are putting on a show about the sea, we understand; so let us have a harbour in Christ...let us meet at Cyprian's table tomorrow.[150]

Scripture reveals **the wonderful deeds that God has done in saving history**, supremely in the work of Christ, the gladiator who has never been beaten but who himself has beaten the devil.[151] Similarly, the mighty works of God, carried out through the human beings described in Scripture, are themselves spectacles capable of delighting and thrilling an audience, while putting perspective on other types of entertainments:

> After much practice a man has learned to walk a tightrope, and as he hangs balancing there he has you hanging in suspense. But look at one who achieves feats even more worth watching. Your acrobat has learned to walk on a rope, but he has never made anyone walk on the sea, has he?[152]

Scripture also bears witness to a further form of spectacle, which takes place on the psychological level. Recalling book ten of the *Confessions*, such spectacles are to be found in **the radical turning round of individual lives**, the ability of fallen human beings to resist temptation. Former addicts of the shows like Augustine and Alypius have now become bishops. People are invited to look in amazement at former sinners who have now become respectable Christians, able

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[148] *en. Ps.* 32.3.25.
[149] Cf. Cavadini (1995), 165.
[150] *en. Ps.* 80.23, cf. Chapot (1999), 823.
[151] *en. Ps.* 149.10.
[152] *en. Ps.* 39.9; cf. Harrison (2006), 248.

to control their passions for the shows: 'Who is that circus fan now? Look at that once fanatical admirer of that gladiator, that actor!'[153]

A further spectacle is to be found in **the example of the martyrs**:

> We celebrate the birthdays of the martyrs, we keep the example of the martyrs before us, we contemplate their faith, remember how they were discovered and dragged off, and how they stood before their judges...We keep all these examples before us, and feast our eyes on them, and hope to imitate them. These are the shows that Christianity puts on.[154]

God's *spectacula* occur also in **the glories of creation**, whose plenteousness and ordering reveal his creative work and call his rational creation back to a properly ordered love of all things. The glories of creation contain much to draw the eyes away from the false delights of the shows and give them a new delight that will lead them towards the creator:

> *The earth is filled with your creative work* (Ps. 103:24). What creative work fills the earth? All trees and bushes, all animals, both wild and tame, and the whole human race itself: with all these creatures of God the earth teems. We observe them all, we know them, read about them, recognize them, praise them and proclaim their creator as we gaze on them.[155]

La Bonnardière comments that the particular psalms that Augustine selects for his preaching in Carthage on the occasion of the shows contain an exceptional richness in their evocation of living creatures, trees, flowers, animals of all sorts, wind, sea and forests. Such natural *spectacula*, in addition to the delight in creation that they evoke, have a further symbolic and prefigurative value, providing raw material for the verbal *spectacula* of the sermon.[156]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Augustine, **the heavenly Jerusalem**, the 'vision of peace', is, as its very name suggests, the ultimate *spectaculum*. The peace of the heavenly city is the invisible reality that Scripture lays out before the faithful. Unlike other *spectacula* of whatever kind, peace cannot be

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[153] *en. Ps.* 39.8.
[154] *en. Ps.* 39.16; cf. Markus (1990), 118, n. 41 for further references.
[155] *en. Ps.* 103.4.3; cf. 103.1.18.
[156] Cf. La Bonnardière (1976), 63.

seen with the bodily eye, but such is its power that it bypasses the normal sensory processes and is apprehended on an altogether deeper level, by the inner eye:

> Peace is invisible. What kind of eye equips you so to see it that you love it? If you did not love it, you would not acclaim it so joyfully as soon as it is mentioned. Such are the displays of invisible realities which God puts on for us (*Haec sunt spectacula quae exhibet Deus rerum invisibilium*). How intensely beautiful must that peace be, if your understanding of it has pierced you to the heart.[157]

In the future joys of the heavenly city, all other *spectacula* will come to an end. Indeed, even the preacher's laborious, if necessary, task of inspiring delight in the shows that God provides will no longer be needed:

> See then, what this Jerusalem is, the city urged to sing praise, or rather, see what the city is that will sing praise in the future, as the psalm foretells. In that future life when we shall see and love and praise God, the praises of the city will not need to be evoked and aroused by any prophetic voice.[158]

b. False Solutions: Christianisation and separatism

In order to explore further the practice of love that Augustine brings to the problem of the *spectacula* and to set it in context, it might be contrasted with two other approaches that he might have taken: Christianisation and separatism.[159]

i. Christianisation

It has already been noted that Augustine's dislike of the shows had a long pedigree in the North African church and beyond. The shows had been the subject of discussion at the Councils of Elvira (306), and Arles (314) and by the third and fourth Councils of Carthage (397-8).[160] The fourth Council of Carthage had prohibited attendance by the clergy, although the laity had only been prohibited on Sundays and ecclesiastical festivals, albeit under threat of

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[157] *en. Ps.* 147.15.
[158] *en. Ps.* 147.8
[159] This distinction draws on Rist (1994), 207.
[160] This section draws on Chambers (1903), 12-15.

excommunication if they attended on those days,[161] a threat that was, of course, very difficult to enforce.[162] Christians were forbidden from being *scenici* in the theatre or from marrying one of them, and members of the profession who sought baptism were required to abandon their career.[163] In the light of such firm opposition from the bishops, it might appear that the obvious solution to the problem of the shows, in a Christian empire, was that they should be completely suppressed.

Thus, the shows could have gone the same way as, for example, the pagan cults at the end of the fourth century or Donatism in the years after 405, but they did not.[164] The shows' popularity and their socially integrative function ensured that the imperial attitude took a very different form to what the bishops might have wished. As Lepelley writes, '...the legislation of the "three pious Christian emperors" took no notice of the condemnation of the Fathers of the Church'.[165] As Chambers writes, summarising the regulations of the Theodosian Code:

> ...it is made very clear that the old court favourites are now to be merely tolerated. But they *are* to be tolerated. The idea of suppressing them is never entertained. On the contrary the provision of *spectacula* and of performers for them remains one of the preoccupations of the government. The praetor is expected to be lavish on this item of the budget, and special municipal officers, the *tribuni voluptatum*, are appointed to superintend the arrangements. Private individuals and rival cities must not deport actors, or withdraw them from the public service. The bonds of caste, except for the few freed by their faith, are drawn as tight as ever, and when pagan worship ceases the shrines are preserved from demolition for the sake of the theatres built therein.[166]

In the absence of imperial legislation to prohibit the shows, the issue seems to have been one that Augustine was compelled to address on a pastoral level, partly perhaps because he had little alternative. The option did not exist to compel people not to go to the shows.[167] Rather, they would have to be

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[161] 4 *Conc. Carth.* C88: *Qui die solenni, praetermisso solenni ecclesiae conventu, ad spectula vadit, excommunicetur*; cf. Chambers (1903), 12.
[162] Cf. Chambers (1903), 15.
[163] Cf. Chambers (1903), 12.
[164] Cf. Brown (1972), 264 – 5; Harrison (2000a), 136.
[165] Lepelley (1979), 380.
[166] Chambers (1903), 14-15.
[167] On Augustine's attitude to coercion in other contexts, cf. Brown (1972), 260-79; (1995), 38-53; Harrison (2000a), 152-4; Kirwan (1989), 212-8; Markus (1970), 133-53; Rist (1994), 239-45.

persuaded by their own sense of the superiority of God's *spectacula* to anything that the officially sanctioned entertainments could provide. The lack of any option to coerce people on this issue is perhaps what gives it its particular interest. It is, however, perhaps worth asking what light the *Enarrationes* shed on two related questions: first, given that legislation to prohibit the shows was *not* forthcoming, what impact, if any, did the official Christianisation of the empire have on Augustine's teaching about the shows and, second, rather speculatively, if a 'fuller' process of Christianisation in which the shows *were* suppressed had been possible, would Augustine have welcomed it?

On the first of these questions, it is noteworthy that both Markus and Brown[168] point to a particular verse of one of the earliest of the *Enarrationes*, *en. Ps.* 6:13, as epitomising the height of Augustine's enthusiasm for the concept of *tempora Christiana*. Commenting on Ps. 6:11, *Let all my enemies blush with shame and be thrown into confusion very quickly*, Augustine concludes the exposition by remarking that 'very quickly' (*valde velociter*),

> ...should be understood as referring either to the intensity of the soul's desire or to the power of Christ, who with such speed causes nations to turn to the faith of the gospel, nations that once persecuted the Church in the cause of their idols.[169]

Markus and Brown chart the ways in which, as they understand it, Augustine's mood of optimism, around the turn of the fourth century, bolstered by the sudden collapse of paganism and yoked in to a particular interpretation of history, reflected in works such as *De catechizandis rudibus*, collapsed by about 405 and, by the time of the *City of God,* had given way to a far more ambiguous attitude. By this time, writes Markus, '[t]he whole myth of the Theodosian Christianisation of the empire is now revealed to Augustine as a mirage'.[170]

Some difficulties about tracing a progression of this sort can be attributed to the difficulties of dating individual expositions. For example, a statement that

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[168] Cf. Brown (1972), 267; Markus (1970), 30; (2000), 203.
[169] *en. Ps.* 6.13.
[170] Markus (2000), 206.

Markus takes to epitomise Augustine's triumphant attitude in 400-5, 'the whole world is by now Christ's choir',[171] is given a later date by other scholars.[172] among whom, somewhat surprisingly, is Markus himself who, in *The End of Ancient Christianity*, puts it at 411-3![173]

More fundamentally, perhaps, the theory seems to be called into question by what appears to be Augustine's ability to combine different attitudes to Christianisation within the same sermon. An example of this is his exposition of Psalm 61:5 (412-6),[174] *With their mouths they were blessing, but cursing in their hearts all the while*. Here, Augustine initially explores an Old Testament parallel to the new situation in which the Church finds itself in the aftermath of imperial persecution:

> A reversal of fortunes has come to Christians like that which befell Joseph, by whom they were spiritually prefigured... No longer is he helpless in the hands of brothers who sell him; now he is handing out grain to these same brothers in their hunger.[175]

However, as the exposition continues, a different note is struck as Augustine explores the intermingling of the two cities in the present age. The current situation may be one in which the Church enjoys far better fortunes, but it is far from being perfect or final, and it awaits eschatological separation. The mixture between the two cities means that those belonging to Jerusalem continue to endure difficulties caused by those belonging to Babylon. Thus, Christ's body continues not to be fully satisfied in the present age. The Psalmist's words 'I ran thirstily' express the unity of head and members in the *totus Christus*: they are Christ's words to the Samaritan woman,[176] and his words on the cross,[177] but they are also the words of the Church, expressing the dissatisfaction of the current time:

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[171] *en. Ps.* 149.7, quoted in Markus (2000), 204.
[172] Cf. Fiedrowicz (1997), 438. The exposition is dated at 411-13 according to Zarb; 405-11 according to La Bonnardière; 411 according to Perler and 406 in the opinion of 'other authors'.
[173] Markus (1990), 123; cf. Chadwick (1985), 11, where a similar problem is evident with Chadwick's use of *en. Ps.* 149 to describe events of 399 - other scholars place the exposition at a much later date.
[174] On dating, cf. Boulding (2000-4), 3: 202, n. 1; Fiedrowicz (1997), 433.
[175] *en. Ps.* 61.5; cf. 66.10; 149.13.
[176] Cf. Jn. 4:7.
[177] Cf. Jn. 19:28.

...the body that belongs to this head is running thirstily too, even to the end of time. The body might be challenged: 'why thirstily? What more can you want, body of Christ, Church of Christ. You are held in high honour, you are so exalted and enjoy a status of such dignity even in this world, how can you still be dissatisfied? The prophecy that *all the kings of the earth will worship him and all nations will serve him* (Ps. 71:11) is being fulfilled in your own experience. How can you still be thirsty? What are you thirsting for? Are you not satisfied with all these peoples?'[178]

In answer to this question comes a further question: '...what kind of people are you talking about?' Into the Church have come those who, in the terms of the psalm, appear to bless God and yet curse him in their hearts. Augustine recalls the case of the woman in Luke 7. As a throng pressed around Jesus, he insisted 'somebody touched me.'[179] Augustine tersely encapsulates the distinction that he is making: 'one touched; the crowds pressed'.[180] Many people may throng around Christ but only one actually comes into contact with him. And, from here, he is able to launch into one of his best-known passages of polemic against the shows:

The people who throng our churches at the festivals of Jerusalem fill the theatres on Babylon's high days; yet they serve, honour and pay homage to Christ. This is true of those who are signed with Christ's sacraments while hating Christ's commandments, and true also of others who are not even signed with his sacraments – true even of pagans, even of Jews. They praise, honour and proclaim him but only with their mouths are they blessing. 'I am not concerned with lip service,' says the Church, 'for he who teaches me knows that they are cursing in their hearts all the while. Where they saw a chance of denying me honour, there they cursed.'[181]

The overall effect of the exposition seems therefore to be one of real ambivalence. On the one hand, the reversal of fortunes that has fallen on the Church can be enthusiastically applauded: 'the gospel is making its way throughout the whole world...the prophecies have been proved',[182] and yet this seems to be combined with a *simultaneously* strong awareness that the new situation that has thereby been created is fraught with problems and difficulties.

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[178] *en. Ps.* 61.10.
[179] Lk.7:46.
[180] *una tetigit; turbae premunt.*
[181] *en. Ps.* 61.10.
[182] *en. Ps.* 66.10 (409-12).

Thus, the exposition of Ps. 61, with its comparatively late date and highly ambivalent message, seems to add a certain complexity to the picture that Brown and Markus paint, suggesting that the *Enarrationes* cannot easily be made to show a smooth progression from early euphoria about the Christian empire to later disillusionment with it. Both sentiments seem to be strongly present throughout the exposition.

Thus, despite the enthusiasm for the official Christianisation of the empire that Augustine is able to show on certain occasions, it clearly is the case that the process is, for him, fraught with ambiguity. Despite his approval for Christian rulers who 'make their power the handmaid of [God's] majesty by using it to spread His worship to the greatest possible extent', [183] Augustine generally seems as frightened as he is pleased by large numbers of people coming to church. Crowds, on the whole, are suspect. The throng who press on Jesus but get nowhere massively outnumber the one woman who is able to touch him. Augustine's use of Ps. 39:6, *I announced the news and spoke the message, and they were multiplied in numbers beyond reckoning*, makes a similar point, describing a situation in which the Church appears almost to have been flooded out by bad Christians:

> Even if there are but a few of them in comparison with the far greater crowds outside, still look how our churches are bursting with them, how the walls are bulging with them, how they tread on each other and nearly suffocate each other, so closely are they packed. But then, let there be a public show on offer, and many of these make for the amphitheatre.[184]

In relation to the shows, the official Christianisation of the empire might seem, from Augustine's perspective, to have failed on two counts: not only have the shows been officially sanctioned but, even more seriously, the multiplication of the Christian community 'beyond reckoning' has led to a situation in which a far higher proportion of the congregation attend them than might otherwise have been the case. The goats now very heavily outnumber the sheep. The single

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[183] Cf. *ciu.* 5.24.

[184] *en. Ps.* 39.10; on false brethren pretending to be members of the Church in the hiddenness of their hearts, cf. *en. Ps.* 55.9.

haemorrhaging woman is dwarfed by the immense crowd that surrounds her. Far from helping to stop church members going to the shows. official Christianisation could even be said to have brought about a situation in which more of them do so.

On the second question of whether Augustine would have welcomed a fuller process of Christianisation in which the bishops had had their wishes granted and the shows been prohibited,[185] it seems likely that such a process, had it happened, would have involved big changes in the cosmopolitan city of Carthage in which Augustine delivers much of his preaching against the *spectacula*.[186] To set the discussion in context, it is helpful to bear in mind one or two aspects of Augustine's attitude to this city.

Carthage has, of course, a long and, to some extent, ambiguous history in Augustine's experience prior to these sermons. In his exploration of memory in book ten of the *Confessions*, Augustine asks, 'Do we remember happiness as one who has seen Carthage remembers it?'[187] Carthage, a 'Rome in Africa',[188] the home city of Tertullian and object of his ire against the shows, is the place in which Augustine's own early enthusiasm for the theatre developed. His sermons there are preached against a background of long-standing personal experience of Carthage's circus, amphitheatre and theatre.[189] The harsh tones of Salvian's description of the city fifty years later as 'overflowing with vices and seething with iniquity, teeming with inhabitants and even more with depravities'[190] are not ones that Augustine would be likely to echo, although he does go so far in the *Confessions* as to describe the city as a 'frying pan of illicit loves'.[191] Capturing, perhaps the overall thrust of Augustine's attitude, Quinn comments that, for Augustine, Carthage 'was in some sense a Sin City'.[192]

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[185] On the relatively small impact of Christianity on municipal life, see Harrison (2000a), 119-20.
[186] This paragraph draws particularly on Lancel (2002), 23 – 7 and Norman in Fitzgerald (1999), 132-3.
[187] Translation taken from Lancel (1999/2002), 23.
[188] Salvian, *de gub.* 7.67, quoted by Norman (1999), 133.
[189] Cf. Norman (1999), 133.
[190] *de gub.* 7.70, quoted in Lancel (2002), 25.
[191] *conf.* 3.1.1.
[192] Quinn (2002), 122.

In a passage discussed earlier, Augustine expresses a sense of foreboding about whether, when he talks of *allegoria*, he can in fact be properly understood by the people of a city in which the habits of attending the shows are so deeply ingrained. Because of their social conditioning, the Christians of Carthage will be likely to confuse *allegoria* with *pantomimi*:

> You have before you the bustle of a city where the shows are numerous. I would have been more comfortable talking about allegory in the country, where people might never have heard of allegory except in God's scriptures.[193]

Commenting on Ps. 50, he appears to suggest rhetorically that the city needs, like Nineveh, to be completely overthrown; that the solution to Carthage's problems would indeed be a thorough-going Christianisation that would wipe out the shows and make it virtually unrecognisable from its current degenerate condition:

> Wouldn't we all agree that this city where we are now would be overthrown to good purpose, if all those crazy people would abandon their silly entertainments and flock to church with compunction in their hearts, begging God's mercy for their past deeds? Would we not say then, 'Whatever became of Carthage? It's not what it was, so it has been overthrown in a sense; but now it is something that formerly it wasn't, so it has been built anew.'[194]

However, despite Augustine's call for a moral renaissance in the city, it seems very unlikely that he would have believed that a fully Christianised Carthage, in which the shows had been forcibly eliminated, would really solve the pastoral problems with which people's love of the shows presents him. In the first place, to believe this would be to subscribe to an inflated view of the capacity of a Christian state to shape the character of its members, a view that might be more associated with Plato, Aristotle or Eusebius.[195] As Clark comments, for Augustine,

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[193] *en. Ps.* 103.1.13; cf. 149.7.
[194] *en. Ps.* 50.11.
[195] Cf. Rist (1994), 207-8.

No secular success, no wealth, no political power can make good Christians – this was Augustine's view... The development of the City of God as a community of the faithful took place by a reorientation of human affections from earthly realities as ends-in-themselves to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whom Christians are empowered to see the world as the created reflection of divine love. Adhering to God in this way changed the lives of men and women from within and influenced all their outward actions for the better.[196]

Moreover, even if a Christianised city could shape its inhabitants in such a way, Augustine seems to have little faith that, in view of the nature of fallen man and the mixed nature of the Church, it would ever really be possible to achieve it. Commenting on Ps. 90:2, *In him will I trust, for he will deliver me from the hunter's trap and from the harsh word*, Augustine reflects on those Christians who have to put up with mockery from pagan neighbours. However, he asks his congregation,

Will it help you, my brother or sister, to find a town in which no one is a pagan? I don't think so. In a place like that no one derides a Christian simply for being a Christian, of course, since no pagans are to be found there; but many Christians living disreputable lives there surely will be.[197]

A town in which Christianity is in the ascendant may have its practical advantages, as a comfortable place for people to live, free from pagan taunts, but such a society would, like any other, be full of ambiguity, full of people who, in the terms of Ps. 61, bless God with their mouths whilst cursing him in their hearts. A standing example of this, for Augustine, is the town of Bulla Regia in Africa Proconsularis, which Augustine excoriates owing to the fact that while it is, unlike Carthage, overwhelmingly Christian, containing few Jews or pagans, yet it is also full of prostitutes and theatrical entertainments.[198]

Thus, it seems possible to conclude that, even if a fully-fledged process of Christianisation were to have been possible, in which the shows, like the pagan

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[196] Clark (1994), 104.
[197] *en. Ps.* 90.1.4.
[198] *s. Denis* 17.7-9, cited in Van der Meer (1961), 53; Lepelley (1979), 378. Van der Meer notes that, in the same sermon, Augustine holds up the the neighbouring town of Simittu as a place where '...recently an imperial official organised one of these dirty affairs (a theatre) and none of the dignitaries of the town – no, not a workman or a Jew went to see it'. The reference to the Jews perhaps suggests that, by the same token, any full Christianisation does not make a town moral. the most moral town is not necessarily the most fully Christian.

cult, could be completely swept away, this would not have been a real solution. Official policies could be no substitute for the re-orientation of people's loves. So far as Carthage is concerned, Lancel observes that Augustine's description of his arrival in the city in book three of the *Confessions* is more densely packed with references to love than any other part of his writing.[199] Perhaps it is the case, then, that as he preaches about the shows in this city of all places, he is most keenly aware that any solution to the problem of the shows from which love is absent will hardly be likely to succeed.

ii. Separatism

If 'Christianisation' constitutes one possible solution to the problems presented by the shows, another might be described as 'separatism': an insistence that Christians should simply stay away from the shows. In one sense, it has been argued that this is exactly what Augustine does advocate; however, at a deeper level, a simple form of separatism is not enough, because it does not address the crucial issue of people's love, and the direction of their will. Brown remarks that it was Augustine's 'passionate monotheism' that ultimately led him to reject an older Christian approach to the culture of cities such as Carthage that sought to live and let live: '[t]here was', he writes, 'no part of its exuberant life that could claim to stand outside an all-engulfing Catholic church'.[200]

In order to explore Augustine's approach, it is helpful to compare his teaching on the shows with two separatist programmes – admittedly very different from one another. The first of these is that espoused in relation to money in the early fifth-century Pelagian tract *De diuitiis*. For the author of this work, the possession of wealth is inevitably tainted with avarice: 'as a man ceases to be avaricious, he ceases to be rich'.[201] For, although riches may not have been acquired through greed – they may, for example, have been inherited – it is only through greed that anyone can retain them.[202] The author is keen to point out that his opposition to wealth does not imply a dualistic disowning of the creation itself. He argues that

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[199] *conf.* 3.1.1: *Veni Carthaginem et circumstrepebat me undique sartago flagitiosorum amorum. Nondum amabam et amare amabam et secretiore indigentia oderam me minus indigentem. Quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare*; cf. Lancel (2002), 25.
[200] Brown (1995), 21.
[201] *diu.* 2.
[202] Cf. *diu.* 4.1-3.

it is important to distinguish between physical objects such as gold and silver, which God has placed in the earth that he created, and the phenomenon of riches, which is a product of sinful human society: 'we should not think that all riches are from God merely because all those things are his which, when piled up in one heap, are called "riches"'.[203] Thus, while the physical objects that go to make up riches are value-neutral when owned in small quantities, the phenomenon of riches itself is always inherently sinful: 'whatever can be justly defended comes from God; but anything that is the result of injustice does not come from God…'[204]

The author's solution to the problem of wealth is that Christians should exercise a conscious choice to obey the overwhelming thrust of the commandments, and the clear example set by Christ and the early Church, and give up all their possessions. They should reject falsely allegorising readings of scripture[205] that suggest that it may be possible for some to retain their wealth, and embrace a radically egalitarian ethic in which the ascetic lifestyle becomes the norm for every Christian:[206]

> Has the same law of Christian conduct not been given to all who are called Christians?...We know that we are 'one body', in the words of the apostle (1 Cor. 12:13); if we are truly one, then we should act as one. There is no room for such variety in the same people. Let us search the scriptures and weigh up with serious and careful thought which law we should adhere to and then choose one of these two alternatives either to be compassionate or…to live a life of professed cruelty (*alterutrum eligamus ut aut misericordes simus, aut...crudelitatis professione uiuamus*), if that is what is expedient in our opinion.[207]

In a theme that will be explored in the next chapter, Augustine differs very sharply from the author of *De diuitiis* on the whole issue of the morality or otherwise of wealth, insisting that examples of pride and humility can be found among both rich and poor alike. Of ultimate importance is not the amount of money that anyone might possess, but where their love is placed. It is thus not

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[203] *diu.* 10.10.
[204] *diu.* 8.2.
[205] Cf. *diu.* 10.1: Clement of Alexandria? Augustine?
[206] Cf. Brown (1967), 348: 'Pelagius wanted every Christian to be a monk'.
[207] *diu.* 6.5.

only the physical objects that make up wealth that are value neutral, but also the phenomenon of wealth itself: what is important is how such wealth is loved and used. In this context, however, the significant contrast between the two writers is not so much the *content* of their teaching, but their *pastoral approach*, the way in which they expect their teaching to be put into practice in the lives of those to whom it is addressed.

As may be seen from the extract quoted above, the author of *De diuitiis* describes a simple moral choice between 'two alternatives': riches or their renunciation, recalling Pelagius's stress in his letter to Demetrias that, '...it is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based'.[208] Such an approach lays heavy emphasis on human rationality, and people's powers of willing and choosing in response to what is understood to be a clear divine command. By contrast, for Augustine, it is the work of God's grace that enables fallen human beings to re-orient their loves, so that they desire God more than they desire the shows. The complexities of the human heart are not such that a simple decision to do one thing rather than another could ever be a realistic option, or one that will truly address what needs to be addressed in fallen human beings. Thus, it is not enough that Christians should simply absent themselves from the shows (though they should), it is also important that they should actually *want* to do so because their loves and affections have been otherwise engaged.

Tertullian's *De spectaculis*, which, it has been argued, strongly influences Augustine's teaching on the *spectacula*, nevertheless also differs from Augustine in its advocacy of a separatist approach. Tertullian contrasts the tranquillity, gentleness, peace and quiet that God gives with the violent agitation provided by the shows and culminates by giving voice to the wish that Christians might leave the world altogether so as not to be contaminated but, as a second best, complete separation from the shows will do:

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[208] *ad Dem.* 3.1: *in hac utriusque libertate partis, rationabilis animae decus positum est.*

Would that we did not live in the world with them! Still, we are separated from them in the things of the world. For the world is God's but the things of the world are the devil's.[209]

If the separatist programme of *De diuitiis* differs from Augustine's approach because of what might be seen as its excessive rationalism, Tertullian's separatism differs because of its social escapism - its advocacy of the need for Christians to detach themselves from the many contaminations with which life in the world threatens to afflict them. The ideal situation for Tertullian seems to be one in which Christians would be able to achieve a complete withdrawal from secular society. Since this is not possible, however, withdrawal from the shows is a good second best. By contrast, for Augustine, the claims of the *saeculum* upon Christians cannot be dismissed in such a way. This is clear in, among many other places, the contrast suggested by Kirwan between Plotinus's opinion that the wise man will lay aside his rulership,[210] and Augustine's statement in book nineteen of the *City of God*, that the wise man should indeed take his seat on the judge's bench since 'the claims of human society, which he thinks it wicked to abandon, constrain him and draw him to this duty'.[211] Augustine's teaching on the shows aims to enable members of his congregation to live *within* the *saeculum*, but in a way that is faithful and responsible, with their loves rightly ordered. It does not, as Tertullian's seems to, betoken a wish for complete withdrawal from any engagement with the secular, or a sense that any such engagement will necessarily lead to contamination.

So far as the shows are concerned, then, the attitude of Augustine might be summarised by the words of Jesus to the disciples near the end of Luke's gospel, 'stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high'.[212] For the Christians of Carthage or any other town, complete withdrawal from society is neither a realistic option nor, indeed, the ideal. Rather, they must stay there, diligently discharging their obligations in the present age, in the hope that God will pour his Holy Spirit into their hearts to re-orient their loves and re-order

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[209] *spect.* 15: *Utinam ne in saeculo quidem simul cum illis moraremur: sed tamen in saecularibus separamur, quia saeculum Dei est, saecularia autem diaboli.*
[210] *Enn.* 1.4.14.
[211] *ciu.* 19.6; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.31.1; Kirwan (1989), 218.
[212] Lk. 24:49.

their lives. In a theme that will be explored in chapter three, ascent to the heavenly city, which is the final goal of Christian pilgrims, is not a matter of escaping from the demands of the present.

By contrast with separatist programmes, it is not enough that Christians should simply absent themselves from the shows (though they should), it is also important that they should actually *want* to do so because their loves and affections have been otherwise engaged. It is the *spectacula* of God that must truly delight their eyes, rather than public entertainments.

3. The shows and the two cities

As will be discussed in the next chapter, Augustine's aim in many parts of the *Enarrationes* is to encourage his congregation to long for the eternal Jerusalem.[213] One of his objections to the shows seems to be that they purvey a fundamentally false eschatology:

> We need to be frightened so that we may not love the present failing, fleeting, transient life as though there were no other life for us. If indeed there is no other, let us all fall in love with this one. If there is no other life, those who have stayed awake today to go to the amphitheatre are better off than we are.[214]

The eschatology that the shows imply, as Augustine represents it in the *Enarrationes*, is essentially over-realised. His criticism of it is comparable, perhaps, to that of Paul to the Corinthians: 'already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings'.[215] The corporate rejoicing and emotional release of the shows, strongly evident in Augustine's descriptions of Alypius, disrupts the eschatological scheme. It appears to hold out a hope that, in the language of the expositions of the Psalms of Ascent, the graced journey to Jerusalem that fallen, sinful pilgrims undertake, can somehow be anticipated in the present. Commenting on Ps. 32:19, *To*

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[213] This theme is particularly discussed in ch. 3 below.
[214] *en. Ps.* 147.3.
[215] 1 Cor. 4:8.

deliver their souls from death and sustain them amid famine, Augustine explains that 'this present life is the season of famine, but the life to come will be the season of full satisfaction'. This is the true state of affairs but one that the audience at the shows fail to understand:

> Those who are still spectators in the amphitheatre may be crazy with excitement, and they are seated, but in the sun; as for us, even if we are standing up, we are in the shade, and we are looking at much more profitable and more beautiful spectacles.[216]

The postures of those at the games and those in church, seated in the former, but standing in the latter, reflect deeper truths about their lives. Like the Corinthians, the spectators have their ease already: they are seated. Faithful Christians, by contrast, are standing, enduring a life of difficulty. However, the comfort of the spectators is not true comfort since they are in the sun; whilst the faithful, although they are still standing, at least do so in the shade of a basilica. Pilgrims travelling to the heavenly city are indeed aware that they live in a state of unfulfilled longing and yet, though such longing is painful, it is far preferable to the premature satisfaction gained by theatre-goers. Augustine's preaching is intended to encourage restlessness and the desire for God, and these are what the shows falsely promise to quench, offering instead early relaxation and the false fulfilment of desire.[217]

> A praying person weeps and sighs, but with what sweetness! The tears of those who pray are more delicious than the pleasures offered by theatrical shows. And listen to the burning desire that arises when this bread is eaten.[218]

It seems, however, that they do even more than this. For, underlying the decision that certain Christians make to spend the day at a particular entertainment, Augustine sees huge forces at work: not merely a prematurely realised version of the Christian eschatological hope but something that stands in fundamental opposition to it. La Bonnardière draws attention to the stark choices that

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[216] *en. Ps.* 32.3.25.
[217] On the incompleteness of human life in the *saeculum*, see Brown (1972), 38-9.
[218] *en. Ps.* 127.10.

confront the Carthaginians in the group of expositions that she examines. There is a choice between two types of spectacles: those of the circus and amphitheatre and those that are evoked by the Psalmist; between two collections of animals: the horses ridden by skilful coachmen, and the animals described by the Psalmist; between two types of impoverished men: the evergetes and actors who at great cost to themselves maintain the decadent festivities, and the poor clergy who aim to construct places of worship and help the poor. In this sharply bifurcating vision, La Bonnardière argues, Augustine sees the conflict between Jerusalem and Babylon being played out:[219]

> There is one city, and over against it another city, one people and another one people, a king and a king. What am I talking about – one city and another one city? Babylon is one, and Jerusalem is one. Whatever mystical names may be applied to it elsewhere, it remains one city set over against another one city. One has the devil for its king, but Christ is king of the other.[220]

Clearly, the Psalms themselves, especially Ps. 136 with its evocation of the exile in Babylon, provide a *literary* link between the *Enarrationes* and Augustine's mature writing on the theme of the two cities.[221] However, La Bonnardière's suggestion points to a further connection that is not only literary but also deeply related to the *pastoral* circumstances in which these expositions are delivered. It is certainly the case that there is a significant coincidence between the *Enarrationes* that explore in detail the theme of the two cities, and those in which Augustine criticises the shows.[222]

In his preaching on the *spectacula*, Augustine compares the situation of 'abstaining' Christians in the show seasons to that of exiled Jerusalem held captive in Babylon,[223] and he believes attendance or non-attendance at the shows to be a litmus test, able to reveal a fundamental division between those oriented towards one city or the other.[224] Church congregations, with their mixture of show-goers and abstainers, provide in miniature a picture of the current mixed

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[219] Cf. La Bonnardière (1976), 90.
[220] *en. Ps.* 61.6; cf. *cat rud.* 19.31.
[221] Cf. Van Oort (1991), 351-7; Fiedrowicz (2000), 48-50.
[222] *Enarrationes* in which the Babylon theme is particularly prominent are *en. Ps.* 61, 64, 86, 136, 147. Those underlined also include mention of the shows.
[223] Cf. Lancel (2002), 310; cf. *en. Ps.* 136.1.
[224] Cf. *en. Ps.* 61.10.

reality of the two cities.[225] Those Christians who repudiate the shows are true citizens of Jerusalem and, at the end, 'God will draw his people out from captivity in Babylon'.[226]

Perhaps, then, the shows have a particular role in the development of the theme of the two cities, in that they seem to Augustine to encapsulate Babylon in its purest state: the distilled essence of Babylon. They epitomise all that is opposed to the heavenly city. The insanity and dishonesty that are so characteristic of his descriptions of the shows in both the *Enarrationes* and the *Confessions* gives a strong insight into the nature of the city whose very name means confusion[227] (*insanitas* + *mendaces* = *confusio*?). The curiosity that draws the eyes and the intellect towards worthless spectacles directly contradicts the eternal contemplation of God enjoyed by the inhabitants of Zion. The conflicting and deeply felt loves in evidence over this issue, the love that people have for the shows on the one hand and the love of God's *spectacula* that Augustine seeks to build up on the other, epitomise the two loves that have built two cities.[228]

Conclusion

Superficially, Augustine's preaching about the shows might seem to have been a success. The decline of public entertainments in the fifth century was such that the historian of the theatre, E. K. Chambers, is able to conclude sourly at the end of his opening chapter that '[t]he bishops and the barbarians had triumphed'.[229] However, as Chambers indicates, it seems clear that the demise of public entertainments in reality owed little to the influence of the bishops, and much more to the fact that the Goths hated the civic consensus that they fostered, and that the increasing poverty of city life in the Roman Empire in the fifth century made the shows more and more difficult to sustain.[230] 'On the ground', it also seems clear that Augustine's sharply dichotomised views about the

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[225] Cf. *en. Ps.* 64.2.
[226] *en. Ps.* 147.7.
[227] Cf. *en. Ps.* 64.2, 8; 125.3; 136.1; *cat. rud.* 21.37.
[228] Cf. *ciu.* 14.28.
[229] Chambers (1903), 22.
[230] Cf. Chambers (1903), 19-21; Lepelley (1979), 381.

incompatibility of attendance at church and shows was on the whole not shared by the Christian laity who generally seem to have had no trouble in combining the two activities, just as they had no trouble in continuing with a variety of other activities that might have been considered 'pagan'.[231]

To this extent, Augustine's preaching on the shows looks like a bit of a failure. However, if it is a failure, it might be seen as a heroic one. For the pastoral approach he develops on this issue sets a 'gold standard' for pastoral ministry. For, underlying it is the perception that people will truly be brought to do good and avoid evil, not because they fear coercion, nor out of the urge to keep themselves uncontaminated by the world, but rather because God has poured love into their hearts, filling them with a desire for himself and effecting their renewal at the deepest level:

> You show me a different light of day, you teach me about a different dawn, you flood me with a different gladness, you give me an inkling of something different in my inmost self, and so you have saved me from craving the human light of day.[232]

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[231] On the attachment of Augustine's congregation to pagan practices, see Chadwick (1995), 23-4; Finn (2006), 208; Harrison (2000a), 132-40; Lancel (2002), 318-320; Lepelley (1979), 384.
[232] *en. Ps.* 96.19.

Chapter Three

THE DOUBLE FACE OF LOVE

The Psalms of Ascent and their Pastoral Application

Introduction

Augustine's expositions of the Psalms of Ascent[1] form an apparently continuous series of sermons, preached around AD 406-7.[2] This chapter falls into two sections. The first will discuss Augustine's understanding of ascent to God as he presents it in the *Enarrationes*. The second section of the chapter will discuss some of the ways in which Augustine's presentation of ascent influences and shapes his pastoral theology, concentrating especially on the themes of monasticism, almsgiving, and the life of the Church more widely.

Reflection on the theme of ascent occurs in Augustine's early works[3] and it figures prominently in the accounts he gives in the *Confessions* of early experiences around the time of his conversion. However, as Harrison comments, whilst ascensional schemes, particularly those associated with the liberal arts, become less prominent in Augustine's later works, they do not disappear.[4] In fact, it will be argued that Augustine, as he preaches on this group of psalms, continues to show himself deeply indebted to Plotinus and to his own earlier thought on the subject while, at the same time, bringing these into an entirely new context, and seeing whole new dimensions in the theme of ascent.

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[1] Day comments that probably '...these psalms were sung by certain pilgrims and processions as they went up to Jerusalem, perhaps by the steps of the city of David'. Day (1992), 62.
[2] AD 406-7; cf. Boulding (200-4), 5: 497, n. 1; Fiedrowicz (2000), 437. On the unity of the group of psalms, cf. Rondet (1953), 15: 'Les quatorze sermons sur les Psaumes des degrés forment un corps'.
[3] For example, *ord.* 1.1.3-2.4; *quant.* 70-6; *s.Dom. mon.* 3. For a discussion of these, cf. Harrison (2006), 41-55.
[4] Harrison (2006), 42.

1. The background and meaning of ascent in the *Enarrationes*

a. Ascent in space and time

What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land; nor need you think of coach or ship to carry you away; all this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use.[5]

Plotinus's well-known words in the *Enneads* alert us to what is perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the journey of ascent, as Augustine conceives it, whether in the *Confessions*, the *Enarrationes* or elsewhere: its physical stability. Ascent is a stationary journey. It happens right where we are. Perhaps, as Peter Brown speculates, this idea appealed naturally to Augustine's own tastes and preferences:

…Augustine detested travelling… [H]is 'pilgrim' is far closer, in his romantic discontent and yearning, to the *Der Wanderer* of Schubert's song than to the jovial globe-trotters of the *Canterbury Tales*. The image, therefore, could provide a radically otherworldly man with a language of incomparable richness and tenderness: the 'authentic philosopher' of Plotinus, endowed with the 'soul of a lover', also sighing for a distant country, is the first cousin of the *peregrinus* of Augustine.[6]

Moreover, echoes of the Plotinian journey 'not for the feet' are striking at various points in the *Confessions*. For example, in book eight, Augustine records his time with Alypius in the Milan garden, telling us that,

We sat down as far as possible from the house. I was groaning in spirit and shaken by violent anger because I could form no resolve to enter into a covenant with you, though in my bones I knew that this was what I ought to do, and everything in me lauded such a course to the skies. It was a journey not to be undertaken by ship or carriage or on foot, nor need it take me even that short distance I had walked from the house to the place where we were sitting; for to travel – and more, to reach journey's end – was nothing else but to want to go there, but to want it valiantly

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[5] *Enn.* 1.6.8.
[6] Brown (1967), 324; for a contrasting view of Augustine's own attitude to journeys, cf. Hill (1996), 126, n. 4.

and with all my heart, not to whirl and toss this way and that by a will half crippled by the struggle, as part of it rose up to walk while part sank down.[7]

Ascent to God, then, is not about physical movement. Those who, like the Circumcellions, tend 'always to be roaming about, with no fixed abode' are, for this among other reasons, unlikely to be spiritually successful.[8] To ascend is not to move from one place to another but, rather, the process is an internal one: a matter of the orientation of the will, the soul and the affections of the heart.[9] In another passage of the *Confessions*, saturated with echoes from the psalms of ascent, the point is made even more strongly:

Now my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me. Your Gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch his flame and up we go. In our hearts we climb these upward paths (Ps 83:6), singing the songs of ascent (Ps 119:1). By your fire, your beneficent fire, are we enflamed, because we are making our way up to *the peace of Jerusalem*. For *I rejoiced when I was told, 'We are going to the Lord's house*' (Ps 121:6). There shall a good will find us a place, that we may have no other desire but to abide there for ever (cf. Ps 60:8).[10]

However, if the ascent to God is stable in *physical* space, it is nonetheless *temporally* fleeting and extremely difficult to sustain. Near to the end of the *Enneads*, the question is asked, 'How comes the soul not to keep its ground?'[11] It is explained that the soul has not escaped wholly from the body. When it does, there will be an unbroken vision although, as Rist points out, terms such as 'vision' and 'experience' are misleading in this context since, when ascent is truly achieved, the duality between the seer and what is seen will disappear and the identities of the human Soul and the One will be entirely merged.[12] But, in the present life, any fleeting glimpse that might be gained of this ultimate state of union with the One is destined, even for Plotinus, to be extremely short-lived. As Harrison comments,

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[7] *conf.* 8.8.19; cf. 1.17.16; 1.36.41.
[8] *en. Ps.* 132.3; cf. *en. Ps.* 99.13. On Augustine's depiction of the Circumcellions in this passage, see Boulding (2000-4), 6: 177, n. 9; Frend (1952); Lancel (2002), 228.
[9] Lawless (2000), 144.
[10] *conf.* 13.9.10, italics and psalm references in Boulding (1997), 348-9; cf. *conf.* 29.2.10; O'Donovan (1980), 20-1.
[11] *Enn.* 6.9.10.
[12] Rist (1967), 221.

> The goal of the ascent, or union with the One, is...elusive; Plotinus himself claims to have enjoyed it only four times in his life and suggests that it will only become permanent in the life to come (*Enn.* 6.9.111.45-51).[13]

In line with this, the experiences of ascent that Augustine recounts in the *Confessions* show him unable to sustain an ascent for any length of time. Thus, after one of the ascents recounted in book seven, Augustine tells us that,

> ...to keep my gaze there was beyond my strength. I was forced back through weakness and returned to my familiar surroundings, bearing with me only a loving memory, one that yearned for something of which I had caught the fragrance, but could not yet feast upon.[14]

In book nine, a similar experience of transience befalls him in the vision at Ostia that he shares with Monica. Although the ascent is different in character and more successful than those in book seven, for reasons that will be discussed below, it nevertheless passes rapidly away:

> ...as we talked and panted for it, we just touched the edge of it by the utmost leap of our hearts; then, sighing and unsatisfied, we left the first-fruits of our spirit captive there, and returned to the noise of articulate speech, where a word has beginning and end.[15]

Again, in book ten, Augustine depicts ascent to God not as a mystical experience but, rather, as the slow and painstaking business of living as a Christian amidst the many temptations of the world. Here, as O'Donnell puts it, 'Augustine does not turn his back on the intellectual ascent of the mind to God; he now pursues it in a different way, one more ambiguously constructed, reflecting the continuing search for God and the continuing failure of that search to achieve perfect fruition'.[16] The process of daily engagement and struggle described here might seem to be easier to sustain than the experiences of the earlier books, and yet, here again, Augustine despairs of the fleeting nature of his ascent:

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[13] Harrison (2006), 39.
[14] *conf.* 7.17.23.
[15] *conf.* 9.10.24.
[16] O'Donnell (1992), 3: 150.

From time to time you lead me into an inward experience quite unlike any other, a sweetness beyond understanding. If ever it is brought to fullness in me my life will not be what it is now, though what it will be I cannot tell. But I am dragged down again by my weight of woe, sucked back into everyday things and held fast in them; grievously I lament, but just as grievously am I held.[17]

Thus, throughout the *Confessions*, it seems clear that for fallen human beings, ascent to God can never be made permanent in this life. At each experience of it, Augustine finds himself falling back, unable to sustain the vision in his present sinful state. However, it also becomes increasingly evident that this inability to sustain the vision will not continue for ever but waits on an eschatological future, in which the ascent will indeed be made permanent. Concluding the account of his experience at Ostia, Augustine sees that, although the vision cannot be sustained in the present, yet it can and will be in eternal life. The experience is 'fleeting and frustrating but full of hope of permanence beyond'.[18] Louth comments, '[f]or Augustine, ecstasy is something which *if it went on for ever* would be indistinguishable from the joys of heaven' and the promises of the New Testament are precisely that it will be given a permanence that it does not currently have:

...this moment of knowledge –
this passing moment that left us aching for more –
should there be life eternal,
would not *Enter into the joy of your Lord* (Mt. 25:21)
be this, and this alone?
And when, when will this be?
When we all rise again, but not all are changed? (1 Cor. 15:51)[19]

The Plotinian unease and dissatisfaction about the soul's inability to keep its ground have thus been placed within an eschatological framework derived from the New Testament. The time of unbroken vision will come about at the general resurrection from the dead. It is then that the soul will indeed be able to keep its ground.

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[17] *conf.* 10.40.65.
[18] Cf. O'Donnell (1992), 3: 122.
[19] *conf.* 9.10.25.

When Augustine comes to preach on the Psalms of Ascent, his sense of the *space* in which the journey of ascent to God might happen has remained the same. Ascent remains a journey 'not for the feet', requiring no physical relocation: 'you must not attempt to climb with your feet', he tells his congregation, 'nor must you think that it is on foot that you will descend'.[20] It is, again, a matter of the will, the affections, the orientation of the heart:

> Lift up your hearts to heaven! You ask: 'How can I do it? What ropes are needed? What machinery, what ladders?' The steps are your affections, your will is the way. You ascend by loving, by neglect you descend. If you love God you are in heaven while standing upon the earth, for the heart is not raised as the body is raised. When the body is raised it changes its place: when the heart is raised it changes its desire.[21]

His sense of the *time scheme* of ascent has however developed considerably, albeit in line with the way in which his earlier thoughts were tending. Ascent has, to a large extent, lost any connotation it might have had of a short-lived spiritual experience,[22] and is very firmly placed in the eschatological time frame suggested at the end of the vision at Ostia. In the *Enarrationes*, the journey of ascent is one that does indeed look toward fulfilment when the Church enters into the joy of her Lord. Thus, the *Enarrationes* essentially depict ascent to God as the orientation of the whole Church towards a creator God and the future life that he promises in the heavenly city of Jerusalem. Earthly pilgrims, currently living in tents (*tabernacula*), seek a settled homeland in the house of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.[23] Towards that homeland, they 'travel not on foot but by our affections'.[24] Far from being an experience that lasts for a few moments and then passes away, ascent to God has become almost an umbrella concept describing the whole of the Christian life:

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[20] *en. Ps.* 126.1; cf. 38.2; 83:6; 119.1, 8; 126.6. On the (perhaps related) importance of a stable place of prayer in the monastery, cf. *reg.* 2.2.
[21] *en. Ps.* 85.6; cf. Bonner (2004), 95.
[22] It has not entirely lost these connotations; cf. *en. Ps.* 134.6, preached at a similar period.
[23] *en. Ps.* 131.10.
[24] *en. Ps.* 121.11: *Non enim pedibus imus, sed affectibus.*

These songs have only one thing to teach us, brothers and sisters, and that is how to ascend. But our ascent must be made in the heart by a good intention, in faith, hope and charity, in a desire for eternity and everlasting life.[25]

The journey of ascent has a radically ambiguous character. On the one hand, as the pilgrims mount up to the heavenly city, they make the characteristic noise of human beings going up any set of steps: they groan. It is the nature of the Church's lot in the present life to 'groan with pain';[26] 'the whole of this mortal life is a flogging for us'.[27] The pilgrims' groaning expresses both the difficulty of their ascent and their love for the final destination, but it has also a nostalgic aspect: they weep as they remember the Zion that they have lost.[28] The groaning of the pilgrims is, however, mitigated by their hope:

We groan over our situation as it is, but we are comforted by our hope. When the present reality has passed away, eternal joy will take the place of groaning, and then we shall have no need of consolation.[29]

Indeed, there is a sense in which the groaning has its own satisfaction, its own sweetness. Commenting on Ps 127:2, *You yourself shall eat the labours of your fruits*, Augustine says,

You turn away then and go back to God and moan in his ears, for he is the one you are sighing for until you come to see him. You groan with longing for him and weep with desire; and, because it is desire that moves you to weep, your very tears are sweet and are like food to you.[30]

The psalms themselves have a special genius for articulating the eschatological tensions that the pilgrims experience within themselves as they make their journey towards Jerusalem. Because of their own complexities and contradictions, their inherent tensions and their rapid mood swings, the psalms are able to contain within a single textual space not only the complex and

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[25] *en. Ps.* 120.1.
[26] *en. Ps.* 126.9; cf. *en. Ps.* 37.28; 125.2; 131.10.
[27] *en. Ps.* 122.6: *tota ista vita mortalis plaga nostra est.*
[28] Cf. *en. Ps.* 136.
[29] *en. Ps.* 125.4; cf. 119.6.
[30] *en. Ps.* 127.10, *dulciores sunt lacrymae...*

ambiguous groanings of unascended human beings but, in addition, the joy of those who have already arrived at their destination. The result is that 'all sing the psalm together – both the saints who rejoice in the reality and we who join them in hope'.[31] For here, as in other parts of the *Enarrationes*, the text of the psalms itself articulates the voice of those who sing it together and hear it preached, who form one body with Christ their head:

> We should hear his [Christ's] voice, her [the Church's] voice in all the psalms, jubilating or groaning, rejoicing in hope or sighing with love in fulfilment; we should hear it as something already well known to us, a voice most familiar because it is our own.[32]

b. Ascent and grace

Throughout Augustine's ascents as they are depicted in the *Confessions*, the need for God's grace is repeatedly emphasised. Even in the very early and more Plotinian experiences of book seven, Augustine's interior journey is strongly marked by grace:

> Warned by these writings that I must return to myself, I entered *under your guidance* the innermost places of my being; but only *because you became my helper* was I able to do so.[33]

As Van Fleteren remarks, even in this opening sentence, grace intervenes in two ways. In the first place, Christ, identified in *de Magistro* as the interior teacher admonishing his pupils, is depicted as responsible for initiating Augustine's journey of 'progressive interiority'. Moreover, Christ continues to guide Augustine once he has embarked upon his journey.[34]

In book ten of the *Confessions*, the role of grace is even more strongly pronounced in Augustine's discussion of the threefold temptations. In a passage that was discussed in the previous chapter, Augustine writes, 'you command me without question to abstain "from the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and

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[31] *en. Ps.* 123.3.
[32] *en. Ps.* 42.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 123.3; cf. Brown (1967), 257. On the Christian community discovering its own voice in the words of the Psalms, cf. ch. 1 above.
[33] *conf.* 7.10.16, cf. Van Fleteren (1974), 42, my italics.
[34] Van Fleteren (1974), 42.

the ambition of the secular world" (1 John 2:16)',[35] and his painstaking account in the second half of the book of the power of these different temptations and how they might be avoided form, as has already been noted, an alternative type of ascent to that depicted in books seven and nine. Yet, the basis upon which this command might be obeyed is, again, God's grace. Only if God gives what he commands will it be possible to obey: 'give what you command and then command whatever you will'.[36] Only God's grace will allow Augustine to achieve ascent in the midst of the difficulties and temptations that he depicts in book ten. Similarly, Harrison argues that, contrary to what might be expected, grace plays a key role in Augustine's early reflection on ascent; that, even in his early works, 'the soul can make no progress without divine assistance'.[37]

The emphasis on the need for grace provides one of the most obvious points of contrast with Plotinus, who, in the *Ennead* on Beauty, counsels,

> Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the saintless shrine.[38]

Once we have made the perfect statue of ourselves our purified souls are fit to undertake the journey of ascent: 'call up all your confidence, strike forward yet a step – you need a guide no longer'.[39] Plotinus's aim of self-abandonment, through surrender to the One,[40] is clearly very different from Pelagius's goal of self-perfection through following the commandments. And yet, the image of chiselling out a statue is comparable to an image used by Pelagius of God's giving the 'file' of the written law, whose application to corroded human nature

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[35] *conf.* 10.30.41. On Augustine's use of 1 Jn. 2:16, cf. Harrison (2006), 180-1.
[36] Cf. *conf.* 10.29.40.
[37] Harrison (2006), 54.
[38] *Enn.* 1. 6. 9.
[39] *Enn.* 1. 6. 9; cf. Louth (1981), 40.
[40] Cf. *Enn.* 1.5.8.11; 5.5.4.8; 6.9.11.24.

allows it 'to recover its former brilliance'.[41] Both suggest two related ideas. The first is that human beings themselves are the agents of change and improvement in their own lives, the authors of their own ascent. 'The idea [of grace]'. argues Henry, 'is utterly foreign to Plotinus' thought'.[42] Similarly, Louth writes,

> Plotinus' One is immutable and insensible. It is the object of the soul's quest – but cares nothing for the soul, or its quest. Not so with Augustine's God: 'Thou didst call and cry to me, and break open my deafness.' Augustine's emphasis on grace and on God's own activity towards the soul vastly transcends Plotinus' notion of the soul's dependence on the One.[43]

The second point, implicit in the images of both Plotinus and Pelagius, is an anthropological one: both writers imply that *exterior* work on the human person will be sufficient to put it into shape and repair any damage that may have been done to it. However, the problems caused by the temptations that Augustine recounts in book ten of the *Confessions* and the deep grip that these exert upon his personality are far too complex and pervasive to be amenable to external solutions. As O'Donnell comments,

> Several scholars have remarked that there is nothing in Plotinus to match Romans 7, where the 'alien that besets us' is our own fallen will. Plotinus is beset from outside only, fortunate fellow; purification is the stripping away and elimination of that inside us that has got there from outside. Division against himself is division of soul against body, not a lingering division within the soul itself…Augustine here sounds like a man who has read this passage and despairs of achieving the calm it depicts. To him, Paul in Romans has the more compelling description of the state of his soul, and offers help from outside that Plotinus did not have.[44]

In many respects, Augustine's depiction of the city of Jerusalem towards which the pilgrims travel and Plotinus's evocation of the Fatherland are similar. Commenting on Ps. 121:3, *It shares in the Selfsame* (*cuius participatio eius in Idipsum*), Augustine asks of the heavenly city 'how can I say anything about it, except that it is Being-Itself?' The city of pure and unchanging being is the city of the God who says, 'I AM WHO I AM', the One who is simply being in itself.

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[41] *ad Dem*. 8.2. This image will be discussed further in ch. 4.
[42] Henry (1991), lxxxi.
[43] Louth (1981), 144.
[44] O'Donnell (1992), 2: 479.

By contrast to the city, the human soul currently has a mutable character, in which, deprived of absolute being, it is 'powerless to stand', 'pulled this way and that and stretched by its desires'. On arrival at the heavenly city and united with God, it will lose its mutability and be able to participate in Being-Itself.[45]

It is, however, the importance of grace that defines many of the essential differences between Augustine's understanding of the journey of ascent to Jerusalem, and Plotinus's description of the soul's quest to enjoy the purity and simplicity of union with the One. Van Fleteren emphasises in the *Confessions* the distinction between the personal nature of the *tu* which Augustine uses to describe God and the impersonal One, Beauty or God of Plotinus.[46] Similarly, in the *Enarrationes*, Jerusalem cannot simply be described in metaphysical terms as the pilgrims' 'principle', 'cause', 'source' or 'root'. Rather, it is their beloved homeland and final destination, which exerts a personal and emotional pull upon them: it is a city for which they weep, sigh and groan: [47] 'these psalms are…the songs of lovers, afire with holy longing',[48] like a bride loving her intended husband and sighing for him as she awaits their marriage.[49] Augustine's aim in these expositions is to encourage this sense of longing. Love for the final destination rather than a sense of necessity provides fuel and energy for the journey that is being made towards it. As Brown comments,

> While other Christian moralists of this age of crisis, Pelagius most notably, were to couch their message exclusively in terms of the ineluctable approach of the day of Judgement, Augustine chose a different perspective. He deliberately turned away from the threats of the Gospels, to find in the Psalms a capacity to love the future: the exhortations that Augustine chooses to notice at this time, are exhortations to sing 'serenades' *ad amatoria quaedam cantica*; the emotions he plays on are not fear, but love for a distant and immemorial country: 'the ancient City of God'.[50]

Moreover, the particular quality of the city of Jerusalem is her capacity to inspire love in those who seek her. The Psalms of Ascent are songs of 'longing for

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[45] *en. Ps.* 121.5, cf. 38.7; 103.1.2; 122.12; 127.15; 136.1; Boulding (2000-4), 6: 18, n.14 refers to *conf.* 7.17.23; 9.10.24; 12.7.7.
[46] Van Fleteren (1974), 53.
[47] Cf. Henry (1991), lxxvii.
[48] *en. Ps.* 126.1.
[49] *en. Ps.* 122.5.
[50] Brown (1967), 315.

Jerusalem';[51] 'thither has the psalmist lifted up his faith. thither is he ascending by love and desire'.[52] The love that draws the pilgrims on to the heavenly city is not something that they themselves generate but, rather, the vision of the city itself and the peace that they will enjoy there fuel their journey towards it:

> Think of yourself as you will be when you get there. You are still on the way, but keep your future destiny before your eyes as though you were standing there and already rejoicing with the angels in a joy that can never be taken away from you.[53]

The journey which the pilgrims make to Jerusalem is, then, a graced journey. The love that impels them towards the city is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Their every move towards it requires God's grace to enable its success: would-be climbers must not rely on themselves,[54] but must continually pray the words of the Psalm as they progress, 'Do not let my foot be dislodged'.[55] The scriptures have a vital role to play in this graced journey. Augustine compares them with letters sent back from the city to those still on pilgrimage, reassuring them that they will arrive at their destination, encouraging and spurring them on.[56]

Augustine compares his own basilica with the way in which the city of Jerusalem is built. A physical building, such as the basilica, is built up from the bottom and so the weight of the walls bears downward upon the foundations. By contrast, the heavenly city has its foundations above: 'we are being built spiritually, and so our foundation is established in heaven'.[57] Ascent to God is not a matter of the pilgrims building on their own foundations until they finally reach the destination. Rather, the destination itself exerts a gravitational pull on the ascending pilgrims, drawing them into itself from above.

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[51] *en. Ps. 121.2*: *Ideo psalmus iste...ipsam Jerusalem desiderat...*
[52] *en. Ps.* 122.4.
[53] *en. Ps.* 121.3.
[54] Cf. *en. Ps.* 120.14: *Nemo de se praesumat. De convalle plorationis ascendimus...*
[55] *en. Ps.* 120.5: *Ne des ad movendum pedem meum.*
[56] *en. Ps.* 149.5; cf. *en. Ps.* 73.5; 90.2.1; 102.10; 131.21, 149.5; cf. Boulding (2000-4), 4: 18, n.12 for a discussion of the image of the scriptures as letters sent by God from Jerusalem.
[57] *en. Ps.* 121.4.

If love for the city of Jerusalem, poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, gives the pilgrims the energy they need for the journey of ascent, another love has the capacity to draw them in precisely the opposite direction. The striking opening passage of *en. Ps.* 121 expresses the dichotomy of these two loves in the starkest terms:

> Impure love (*amor immundus*) inflames the soul, lures it towards the pursuit of earthly things which are desirable but doomed to perish, and plunges it headlong into the deepest turpitude. Holy love (*amor sanctus*) 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 lifting it from the depth of hell to heaven. Every kind of love has its own energy, and in the soul of a lover love cannot be idle; it must lead somewhere. Do you want to discern the character of a person's love? Notice where it leads.[58]

Human beings are, in these expositions, in a state of perpetual motion, unable ever to stand still or to be idle. Whether on a journey towards Jerusalem or away from it, Augustine often emphasises the impossibility of human beings finding any resting place, since they are always impelled by love in one direction or the other: 'everyone is on the move in this life'.[59] There is little possibility of having a pause for reflection or of finding a neutral, uncommitted space in which to take a break. In a journey of ascent, one either carries on upwards or falls back down: 'all love either ascends or descends;'[60] 'everyone who is making progress is climbing up to this city; anyone who stops trying falls away'.[61]

O'Donovan explores the link between the two different types of love and, as Augustine's thoughts in this series of expositions seem to suggest,[62] the two cities to which those loves ultimately lead:

> When we speak with Augustine of 'love', there is nothing idealistic in the word. We have not leaped with one bound to that love which 'bears all things, believes all things,' and 'never fails' (1 Cor13:7). To invoke that love prematurely has often been a temptation in Christian reflection

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[58] *en. Ps.* 121.1.
[59] *en. Ps.* 55.9: *omnis homo in hac vita peregrinus est.*
[60] *en. Ps.* 122.1.
[61] *en. Ps.* 126.1.
[62] Cf. *en. Ps.* 121.4; 125.3. It is noticeable, however, that the strength of the contrast between Jerusalem and Babylon is not fully developed in this group of expositions.

on society, signalling a drift toward the sentimental, a forgetfulness of the sting of sin. For Augustine, the love that forms communities is undetermined with respect to its object, and so also undetermined with respect to its moral quality: 'the better the things, the better the people: the worse the things, the worse their agreement to share them' (*ciu.* 19.24). Furthermore, every determination of love implies a corresponding hatred. For a community to focus its love on this constellation of goods is to withdraw its love from that. Every concrete community, then, is defined equally by the things it does not love together, the objects it refuses to accept as a ground of its association. So it is that the two ultimate communities, the 'two cities' in which all human beings are grouped, are determined not only by ultimate objects of love, but by ultimate objects of refusal: 'love of God to the point of contempt of self, love of self to the point of contempt of God.'[63]

c. Ascent and Christ

Although, as has been argued, no experience of ascent in the *Confessions* is permanent, clearly not all experiences are equally successful. The most obvious reason for their varying levels of success is the presence – or absence – of Christ within them. As O'Donnell points out, the key difference between Augustine's experiences in book seven and his vision at Ostia with Monica in book nine is that his conversion and baptism have intervened, causing a 'moral renovation through direct contact with Christ'. The earlier experiences of ascent in book seven have strong Christological overtones[64] and the Platonists' lack of a mediator is one that is repeatedly noted.[65] However, the experience of ascent at Ostia has an explicitly Christian character, which makes it decisively different to the earlier ascents, for here, as O'Donnell's puts it, '[t]he persistent Platonic vocabulary is powerful, but does not define the experience'.[66]

Similarly, at the end of book ten, the question of how Augustine is to be united with God is answered in Christ, the true mediator who, unlike the devil or demons, who do not belong to either of the two orders that they are deemed to connect,[67] has 'something in common with God and something in common with humanity'.[68] The possibility of ascent is achieved through Christ's incarnation

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[63] Cf. O'Donovan (2002), 22.
[64] Cf. *conf.* 7.10.16; 7.18.24.
[65] Cf. *conf.* 7.9.14; 7.21.27.
[66] O'Donnell (1992), 3: 122.
[67] Cf. Rémy (1991), 584.
[68] *conf.* 10.51.67.

and vicarious sacrifice. O'Donnell writes that, 'Augustine closes the central book of the work with a passage of such dense Eucharistic imagery that it may best be thought of as perhaps the only place in our literature where a Christian receives the eucharist in the literary text itself'.[69]

It is, then, through Christ's mediation that the Plotinian aim of being 'oned' is achieved: centre does indeed coincide with centre. However, the cause of this union is not, as for Plotinus or Porphyry, the soul's escape from the body. On the contrary, union is achieved by something quite alien to Plotinus: Christ's descent in love, his bodily entry into the world and by the corresponding entry of the believer into that body. Christ's incarnation in mortal flesh and the believer's participation in him in the Eucharist enable the process of 'oneing' to happen: far from being a flight from the body, it is instead a deeper entry into it.

In the *Enarrationes*, it is also Christ's mediation rather than, for example, human powers of contemplation that enables ascent to take place. As Harrison writes, in relation to the *Confessions*,

> ...the Plotinian ascent through the hierarchy of reality becomes, not an independent effort of the soul to move from bodily to spiritual things, but the raising up of humanity by the transcendent God, the Creator God, who descends to lift up his creation by the gracious revelation of his Son and the inspiration of his Spirit.[70]

Thus, Augustine tells his congregation that, in fact, Christ's incarnation makes their own ability or otherwise to contemplate a secondary issue: '...perhaps you do not yet practice contemplation. Do not be put off, do not despair. HE WHO IS willed to become a human being like you.'[71] The eschatological city is able, as has been argued, to draw pilgrims to itself, and it can do this primarily not because of human beings' ability to pray, but because 'the king of our homeland has made himself our way'.[72] The section of *en. Ps.* 121 quoted above which

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[69] O'Donnell (1992), 1: xxxvii.
[70] Harrison (2006), 34.
[71] *en. Ps.* 121.5: *Sed nondum habes forte contemplationem: noli deficere, noli desperare. Qui est, voluit esse homo, ut tu es.*
[72] *en. Ps.* 123.2: *ipse rex patriae factus est in via*; cf. Jn. 14:6; *en. Ps.* 39.18; 90.1.1; 119.1; *ciu.* 10.29; *conf.* 7.18.24; *doc. chr.* 1.11.11; 1.17.16.

characterises the city of God as participating *in Idipsum*, for all its Plotinian echoes, takes a very un-Plotinian twist when it stresses the absolute necessity of the Incarnation for any hope that human beings might have of sharing in the 'being in itself' of the heavenly city:

> Hold on to what Christ became for you, because Christ himself, even Christ, is rightly understood by this name, I AM WHO I AM, inasmuch as he is in the form of God. In that nature wherein he deemed it no robbery to be God's equal (Philippians 2:6), there he is Being-Itself. But that you might participate in Being-Itself, he first of all became a participant in what you are; the Word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) so that flesh might participate in the Word.[73]

The pilgrims' ability to reach the heavenly Jerusalem, to attain the immutable status of their true homeland is only made possible because Christ, the Word made flesh, has taken on mutability and made himself the way for them. Christ is the mountain of his people's ascent, its starting point and goal.[74] He is the good Samaritan, who 'tended us, hoisted us onto his beast by uniting himself to us in the flesh, and took us to the inn, which represents the Church'.[75]

If Christians are to follow the way that Christ has shown and benefit from what he has done, then their ascent also must follow the shape of his as it is outlined in the Christological hymn in Philippians. Ascent must come by descent: by humility rather than pride: 'charity moves us to walk, to make progress and to ascend; pride pushes us into a fall'.[76] Thus, the beginning of the journey of ascent is in the lowest depth possible, the *valle plorationis*.[77] 'Were we to forget that this must be our starting-point we would be getting things upside down and seeking exaltation before the proper time; and then we would not ascend but fall headlong.'[78] It is precisely here that the Psalmist himself starts when at the beginning of Psalm 129 he groans, *Out of the depths I have cried to you, Lord. O Lord, hear my voice*. For the opening words of this well-known psalm give voice to what is, according to Augustine, the correct perception that our present life is

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[73] *en. Ps.* 121.5.
[74] *en. Ps.* 119.1: *hinc ergo ascendendum est, illuc ascendendum.*
[75] *en. Ps.* 125.15. On Christ as the good Samaritan, cf. *en. Ps.* 60.8; Bonner (1970), 560-1.
[76] *en. Ps.* 120.5: *ad ambulandum et proficiendum et ascendendum charitas movet; ad cadendum superbia movet*; cf. *en. Ps.* 50.21; 121.3; 130.7; *ench.* 28.108.
[77] *en. Ps.* 126.6.
[78] *en. Ps.* 120.1.

lived in deep places: '…we must be fully aware of the depth from which we need to cry to the Lord'.[79]

If we do, in humility, follow the movement of Christ's self-emptying, the hope of ascent is made possible, because it is precisely to the deep places that Christ came: '…our Lord Jesus Christ did not despise us in our depths. He graciously willed to come down into this life of ours, promising us the forgiveness of all our sins'.[80] In order, then, for ascent to be successfully accomplished, it is necessary to participate in the downward movement of Christ's humility in order to achieve the upward movement of his exaltation:

> …humility is your guardian in all temptation, for we are climbing up from the valley of weeping, singing our song of ascents; and the Lord is guarding our entrance that we may go into it and be safe.[81]

The descent of Christ thus provides a route for humanity to follow: the pilgrims who wish to ascend to the heavenly city must walk the way of Christ who descended in mercy, and not that of Adam, who fell through pride. Descent and fall are, thus, exact opposites; as Augustine says of Christ: *non ceciderit sed descenderit*.[82]

Ascent is a perilous process precisely because the route that Christ shows is extremely easy either to short-circuit or to miss completely. As Augustine tells his congregation, commenting on Psalm 126:2, *It is a waste of time for you to rise before the light. Rise up after sitting down*, 'To rise up symbolises exaltation, and to sit down represents humility'. The lesson that can be drawn from this is clear:

> …When you rise up from your lowly state you will attain to the kingdom, but if you try to snatch at the kingdom prematurely you will fall away from it even before you rise.[83]

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[79] *en. Ps.* 129.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 103.1.4.
[80] *en. Ps.* 129.1.
[81] *en. Ps.* 120.14; cf. *en. Ps.* 39.3.
[82] *en. Ps.* 122.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 119.2, 8; 122.3.
[83] *en. Ps.* 126.5; cf. *en. Ps.* 127.10.

Indeed, this is precisely what Jesus's disciples do themselves on several occasions in the gospels: 'ambitious for an over-hasty ascent, they aspired to high honours but gave no thought to the route of humility'.[84] So Christ 'recalled them to the way like lost travellers, not because he meant to refuse them what they wanted but in order to show them how to reach it'. 'As pride makes one presumptuous', says Augustine in one exposition, 'so does humility prompt confession',[85] but, as O'Donnell points out in relation to the *Confessions*, *praesumptio* and *confessio*, leading to terrible failure or complete success in the search for ascent, are very close to one another.[86] If the motivation to ascend is, as it easily can be, a matter of pride, a 'perverse kind of elevation',[87] then the attempt will certainly be a failure.

The Christology of the psalms of ascent gives rise to a particular form of pedagogy. Ascent in knowledge and understanding is made possible by the descent of Scripture and preaching. Christ did not, explains Augustine, descend alone, except in the strictest sense, since 'there are many holy people who imitate him by descending to us, and have done so in the past'.[88] Unsurprisingly, pre-eminent among these is the apostle Paul, whose apparently successful experience of ascent,[89] makes him the authority on this subject:

> On what a height must the apostle have been accustomed to dwell when he said, *If we are beside ourselves, it is for God* (2 Cor 5:13)! By going forth in his mind he had gone forth to God. Mentally leaving behind all human frailty, all the temporal concerns of this world, all these transient things that dwindle to nothing as they are born and sink into death, his heart dwelt in a contemplation that defied description, insofar as such a state was possible for him. Of that state he said that the one who experienced it *heard things beyond utterance, of which no human tongue may speak* (2 Cor 12:4). Of those realities he could not speak to you, but he himself was able to see them in some degree, though he could not pass them on. If therefore he had chosen to tarry

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[84] *en. Ps.* 119.1.
[85] *en. Ps.* 121.8: *sicut superbia praesumit, sic humilitas confitetur.* On the dangers of pride in a monastic context, cf. *reg.* 1.7.
[86] O'Donnell (1992), 2: 471.
[87] *ciu.* 14.13: *Quid est autem superbia nisi perversae celsitudinis appetitus?* cf. *en. Ps.* 118.27.9.
[88] *en. Ps.* 119.2.
[89] 2 Cor. 12:1-5.

for ever in what he saw but could not express, he would not have lifted you to a height where you too could see them. But what did he do? He came down.[90]

The descent of Paul from his vision, as Augustine interprets it, has the familiar and authentic Christological shape. Paul might have been able to sustain his vision but, rather than doing so, he stoops down in order to scoop up fallen humanity by his teaching. The realities that he had seen at the height of the experience would have been impossible to communicate but, by coming down, he has been able to pass them down to others. So also did Christ who 'by being born and suffering, made himself such that people could talk about him; for humans easily talk about another human'.

Augustine compares Ps. 130:2, *If I was not lowly in mind but high-flown, may retribution come upon my soul as on a baby in its mother's arms that is torn away from its milk*, with Paul's statement that 'I gave you milk to drink, rather than solid food'.[91] The accommodation of teaching to the capacities of those who hear it mirrors Christ's own accommodation to human weakness. Just as a mother makes milk for her baby out of the bread she eats, so 'our Lord Jesus Christ made the bread that was himself into milk for us by becoming incarnate and appearing as a mortal'.[92] During the time of infancy, Christians must feed on this milky diet. Heresies begin when people, like those ambitious for an over-hasty ascent, become discontented with the milk and start to get ahead of themselves and argue beyond their capacities. The bishop preaching on the psalms participates in the process also. During the entire process of preaching *Enarrationes*, Augustine himself takes the role of the mother, constantly accommodating the teaching of the scriptures to the understanding of his congregation; turning bread into milk.[93]

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[90] *en. Ps.* 119.2.
[91] 1 Cor. 3:2.
[92] *en. Ps.* 130.11; cf. 131.24.
[93] Cf. *en. Ps.* 38.3; cf. Lawless (1994), 22.

d. Ascent and other people

Augustine needed the constant response and reassurance of a circle of friends: both to know that he was loved, and to know that there was someone worth loving, encouraged him greatly to love in return… He found no difficulty in calling a friend 'half my soul' (*conf.* 4.6.11).[94]

Brown's reminder about the importance of friendships in Augustine's life relates to another important theme in his treatment of ascent. From his earliest Christian works onwards, Augustine emphasises the need for human beings to help one another, if the journey of ascent is to have any hope of being successful: 'God is also with those who, seeking him, have also a care for human society. No surer step towards heaven can be found'.[95]

The fact that, for Augustine, ascent is not a matter of physical relocation is perhaps related to the sociable quality that pervades the experiences that he recounts in books seven and nine of the *Confessions*.[96] These take place in the company of friends and family members who, to a greater or lesser extent, come to be involved in them. Thus, in book seven, the company and conversation of Alypius forms a backdrop to the experiences he has there, while, even more significantly, in book nine, the vision at Ostia is one that Augustine actually shares with Monica. At Ostia, it is, as Williams writes, 'in the mutual stimulus, the urging further and further of a *conversation* that there comes a momentary glimpse of sheer fruition'.[97]

One obvious contrast with such sociability is the tradition of the Desert Fathers and, in particular, St Anthony, whose biography Augustine records as having influenced him shortly before his conversion.[98] Indeed, Augustine recounts having considered a separated lifestyle similar to Anthony's: 'Terrified by my sins and the pile of my misery', he tells us 'I had racked my heart and had meditated taking flight to live in solitude'.[99] Although, in a passage quoted below, Augustine shows his awareness that Anthony did not in fact manage to

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[94] Brown (1967), 200-1, my italics; cf. Brockwell (1977), 93-4; Van Bavel (1984), 45.
[95] *util. cred.* 24; cf. Harrison (2006), 51-4.
[96] Cf. Louth (1981), 136.
[97] Williams (1989), 145.
[98] *conf.* 8.6.14; 8.12.29.
[99] *conf.* 10.43.70.

achieve the solitude that he sought in the desert, nevertheless even the desire to achieve it is one that Augustine quickly and decisively rejects.

A further and yet stronger contrast can be drawn with Plotinus's conception of the ascent of the soul as 'the passing of the alone to the alone',[100] a process by which 'each in the solitude of himself shall behold that solitary-dwelling Existence, the Apart, the Unmingled, the Pure'.[101] Paradoxically, it almost seems that because (in agreement with Plotinus) Augustine understands the journey of ascent to be a stationary one, in which he does not seek physical separation, he also comes to see it (in disagreement with Plotinus) as a social one, involving the other people who, if one has decided to remain physically stable in the same place, will therefore not be able to be left behind.

Bearing these things in mind, it comes as no surprise that the journey of ascent to Jerusalem, as described in the *Enarrationes*, is also an inherently social one: '(l)et us run toward our homeland, run like torrents in the south wind'.[102] The joy of ascending pilgrims as they approach the heavenly city is one that they hold in common, and, as Augustine writes of the conversion of Victorinus, 'when many share in the joy, individuals also feel a richer delight. They kindle excitement among themselves and are inflamed by one another.'[103] Ascending pilgrims joyfully encourage one another as they approach the heavenly city. Commenting on the opening verse of Ps. 121, *I rejoiced over those who told me, We are going to the Lord's house*, Augustine observes that,

> When some festival of the martyrs falls due, perhaps, and some holy place is named at which all are to assemble to celebrate the solemn rites, remember how the throngs incite one another, how people encourage one another, saying, 'Come on, let's go, let's go!' Others ask, 'Where are we going?' And they are told, 'To that place, to the holy site.' People talk to each other and catch fire with enthusiasm, and all the separate flames unite into a single flame. This one flame that springs up from the conversation of many people who enkindle one another seizes them all and sweeps them along to the holy place. If, then, holy love energizes people and tugs them to a

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[100] *Enn.* 6.9.11.
[101] *Enn.* 1.6.7.
[102] *en. Ps.* 125.10: *curramus ad patriam...*
[103] *conf.* 8.4.9; cf. Burnaby (1938), 127-8.

material place, what kind of love must it be that tugs persons united in heart toward heaven, as they say to each other, *We are going to the Lord's house*?

The sociable form of the journey of ascent is intrinsically related to the sociable nature of the destination. In the city of God towards which the pilgrims travel, peace is found in the 'perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God and of one another in God'.[104] Citizens of the heavenly city, whose name itself means 'vision of peace', enjoy the true peace which all desire and which is quite different from the provisional and often unjust peace with which they are familiar in the *saeculum*.[105]

Moreover, the sociability of the journey, and the city to which it leads entirely reflects the nature of the human beings who make it, as they were intended by God to be. For, as Augustine writes in the *City of God*, 'there is nothing so social by nature as this race, no matter how discordant it has become through its own fault'.[106] Indeed, at the beginning of creation, although Adam was made first, he was not left solitary and, indeed, the whole reason for Adam's creation was the foundation of a society: 'God chose to create one individual for the propagation of many, so that men should thus be admonished to preserve unity among their whole multitude.'[107]

Van Bavel, writing on *The Double Face of Love in Augustine*[108] describes the period around which the expositions of the Psalms of Ascent are preached as being one in which love of neighbour gains an increasing importance in Augustine's theology, to the extent that he radically shifts his position, moving from his earlier statement that God is love in *De fide et symbolo* (9.19) towards asserting in a sermon on John's gospel that love is God.[109] The same inversion occurs, Van Bavel argues, at least ten times in Augustine's work:

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[104] *ciu.* 19:13; cf. *doctr. chr.* 1.35.32.
[105] Cf. *ciu.* 19:11-13; *en. Ps.* 127.16.
[106] *ciu.* 12.28.
[107] *ciu.* 12.28.
[108] This chapter takes its title from Van Bavel's article.
[109] *Io. eu. tr.* 7.6; cf. Van Bavel (1986), 172.

> If it is precisely the person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells who loves, then love must be God... Love is the gift of God to such an extent that it is called God himself, as is shown by the words of John 'God is love', and anyone who dwells in love is dwelling in God and God in him.[110]

The consequence is that love of God and love of neighbour are understood to be completely identified with one another, so entirely of a piece that they cannot be split up. As Van Bavel writes elsewhere, '[t]he two loves are not competing with each other, but they embrace each other in one great dynamic movement'.[111] As Augustine puts it in another exposition, it is the joint working of the paired wings of love of God and love of neighbour that enable the freed soul to 'fly to the Lord in holy love'.[112] The three commandments that enjoin love towards God are fundamentally of a piece with the seven that command charity towards neighbour: they go together like the lyre and the psaltery, because 'all these commandments are from God'.[113]

Thus, what Harrison writes about Augustine's early works can equally be said to describe the *Enarrationes*: '[t]here is a sense of human solidarity and communion which is wholly absent from Neoplatonism, but which is determinative of Augustine's Christian, ecclesial, sacramental vision of mankind...'[114] Love of neighbour is not simply a ladder or step up which people must climb on their upward path. Rather, the orientation to God and towards the heavenly city of those making the journey of ascent requires a simultaneous orientation toward one's neighbour if it is to be successful, since these two loves entirely co-inhere. It is a long way from 'the alone to the alone'. The point is graphically made in an image taken from the natural world which Augustine uses in one of his expositions of the Psalms of Ascent:

> It is said that when deer cross a strait to a neighbouring island in search of pasture they rest their heads on one another, each on the one in front. Only the deer in the leading position carries the weight of his own head and has no other to rest it on; but when he gets tired he leaves his position and goes around to the rear of the line, where he can rest on another. Thus they carry one

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[110] Van Bavel (1986), 173; cf. *en. Ps.* 98.4.
[111] Van Bavel (1984), 60.
[112] *en. Ps.* 103.1.13.
[113] Cf. *en. Ps.* 32.2.6.
[114] Harrison (2006), 53-4.

another's burdens and reach the place they desire without mishap, because their mutual charity serves them as a sturdy ship.[115]

However, the pilgrims going to Jerusalem are not just a group of friendly individuals, but they actually form one body with Christ their head: 'the head came down, but he went up with his body'.[116] Thus, the *sociable* nature of the journey of ascent is intensified, in the *Enarrationes*, into a *corporate* one: ascent must be viewed as the action of the whole ecclesial body, since 'the person who belongs to God's house is the one who is bonded to other living stones in the solidity of charity'.[117] As Augustine explains to his congregation near the start of *en. Ps.* 122, when they lift up their eyes to the Lord, they do so not as a collection of individuals but as one corporate entity:

Let the singing psalmist make the ascent; but let him sing from the heart of each one of you like a single person. Indeed, let each of you be this one person. Each one prays the psalm individually, but because you are all one in Christ, it is the voice of a single person that is heard in the psalm. This is why you do not say, 'To you, O Lord, have we lifted up our eyes,' but *To you, Lord, have I lifted up my eyes*. Certainly, you must think of this as a prayer offered by each of you on his or her own account, but even more should you think of it as the prayer of the one person present throughout the whole world.[118]

If the *Enarrationes* affirm the importance of the *ecclesial* body as the necessary context for an ascent to God, so they also give strong affirmation to the *physical* body.[119] The Psalmist's journey of ascent, says Augustine, 'is going on in the place where he is to ascend. Just as his pilgrimage is not a bodily one, so his ascent will not be made in the body either.'[120] But although the journey of ascent is not one that is made *by* the body but with the affections of the heart, nor is it a flight *away from* the body either. In fact, the very physical stability of the

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[115] *en. Ps.* 129.4; cf. 41.4.
[116] *en. Ps.* 122.1: *Descendit caput, ascendit cum corpore.*
[117] *en. Ps.* 131.13.
[118] *en. Ps.* 122.2; cf. 130.3.
[119] Cf. McCarthy (2005), 40 for a discussion of the way in which the ecclesial body manifests physical characteristics. On the beauty of the physical body, cf. *ciu.* 22.24.
[120] *en. Ps.* 119.8.

journey ensures that the body, like other people, is an ever-present reality for ascending pilgrims.

Reacting against Manichaean hatred of the body, Augustine, as a Christian, would never, as a Christian, have agreed with Plotinus's disciple Porphyry that *omne corpus est fugiendum*. However, Rist comments that, although Augustine, from the time of his conversion onwards, understood the human being as 'some kind of composite of two substances, a soul and a body'.[121] he nevertheless underwent a profound development in his thinking round about the time of the expositions on ascent:

> One of the scriptural texts which helped Augustine to change his view of the correct attitude to one's body (and to one's neighbour's body) was Ephesians 5:29: 'No one hates his own flesh', the importance of which is recognized in the first book of Christian Teaching (1.24.25). There is much more evidence of the change in the sermons on St John's first Epistle (AD 407). It is clear that as soon as Augustine began to give serious consideration to the dogma of the Resurrection of the body, he found good reasons to conclude that, although the Platonists were right to insist on the subordination of the demands of the body to the demands of the soul, they were wrong, and even began to look 'Manichaean', when they wish to be rid of the body so far as possible.[122]

As has already been seen, Augustine's expositions of the psalms of ascent clearly emphasise the physicality of Christ's incarnation as the basis of humanity's participation in God's immutable nature: 'Hold on to the flesh of Christ'.[123] And, further to this, by the time he comes to preach on the psalms of ascent, the resurrection also has become, for Augustine, 'an essential and defining doctrine.'[124] As he asks his congregation in 403, 'what happiness did He promise you? What but in the resurrection of the dead?'[125] The faith of Christians, he tells his congregation at a similar period, 'is not triumphant because they believe that Christ died but because they believe that Christ rose again'.[126] At a number of points in his expositions of the Psalms of Ascent,

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[121] Rist (1994), 94.
[122] Rist (1994), 109-10; cf. Harrison (1994), 140-162; Zumkeller (1986), 217-220.
[123] *en. Ps.* 121.5: *Retine carnem Christi...*
[124] O'Donnell (1992), 3: 72; cf. Daley (1991), 131-44 ; *en. Ps.* 73.25 on Christians who mock the resurrection of the body.
[125] *en. Ps.* 36.1.9.
[126] *en. Ps.* 101.2.7; on dating, cf. Boulding (2000-4), 5: 45, n. 1.

Augustine teaches his congregation to hope that, at the eschatological culmination of their journey of ascent to the heavenly city, they will not be released from their bodies but, rather, their bodies will be renewed:

When these death-doomed members of ours have been given immortal life, nothing will fight against our spirit. There will be no hunger, no thirst, for these arise from our perishable bodies. You need refreshment because something in you is failing. Craving for carnal pleasures attacks us. We carry death with us because our bodies are so weak, but when death itself has been changed into indefectible life, and this perishable nature has put on immortality, what will death be made to hear? O death, where is your striving? Where, O death, is your sting?[127]

2. The pastoral implications of ascent in the *Enarrationes*

One homeland we have, one homeland most dear to us, one only homeland; and compared with that whatever we have now is nothing but a journey.[128]

The word *peregrinus*, as Augustine uses it, denotes both a traveller to the heavenly city, and also a temporary sojourner, a 'resident alien' in the present one. Yet, as Augustine makes clear in book nineteen of the *City of God*, although God's people will not remain for ever in Babylon, but look forward to their deliverance and eternal life in Jerusalem, nevertheless, at the present time the two cities are intermingled. The pilgrims' over-riding love for the heavenly city should not be at the expense of a proper appreciation of all that binds them here and now to the *saeculum*. The Christian, as Brown writes,

…must accept an intimate dependence on the life around him: he must realize that it was created by men like himself, to achieve some 'good' that he is glad to share with them, to improve some situation, to avoid some greater evil; he must be genuinely grateful for the favourable conditions that it provides. In fact, Augustine had come to expect the Christian to be aware of the tenacity of the links that would always bind him to this world. The thought of his middle-age is marked by a growing appreciation of the value of such links. So the *City of God*, far from being a book

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[127] *en. Ps.* 127.16; cf. 50.19; 64.4; 126.7; 129.12; 131.15; *ench.* 23.84; *doc. chr.* 1.24.25; 1.26.27; cf. Brown (1988), 400-427; O'Collins, (1994), 65-75.

[128] *en. Ps.* 51.7: *Dulcis est enim una patria, et vere una patria, sola patria: praeter illam quidquid est, perigrinatio est.*

about flight from the world, is a book whose recurrent theme is 'our business within this common mortal life'; it is a book about being other-worldly in the world.[129]

In line with this, Augustine's role as a bishop makes his task very different from that of Plotinus. Pastoral responsibility obliges him not only to map out the future destination for human souls, but also, and more urgently, interpret for men and women what sort of lifestyle such a destiny might demand in the present.

It is perhaps because of this that, as Augustine preaches his series of sermons on the Psalms of Ascent, a shift seems to take place. The earlier expositions, while they contain elements of pastoral reflection, concentrate strongly on the eschatological theme of the pilgrims' journey of ascent to Jerusalem. However, as Augustine progresses through the series, and often through each individual exposition, he increasingly ranges more widely, confident that the basic lesson has now been taken on board.[130] As he says in the introduction to *en. Ps.* 123,

> ...you are well aware that a Song of the Steps is a song about our ascent and that the ascent is not made by our bodily feet but by the affections of our hearts. We have pointed this out to you very frequently, and it is not a good idea to repeat it too often, for we need to reserve time for the topics of which we have not yet spoken.[131]

Thus, whereas, in the earlier expositions, Augustine concentrates more on painting a broad picture of the great themes of eschatology, Christology, ecclesiology and grace, in the later ones the focus is more on filling in the detail; on showing how the eschatological vision of the heavenly city is able to generate pastoral insights that will contribute to Christian life here and now in the *saeculum*.

Two expositions in this group suggest themselves for particular attention as they contain more systematic pastoral reflection: *en. Ps.* 132, which is almost entirely given over to a discussion of the monastic life, and *en. Ps.* 125, in which Augustine extensively covers the subject of almsgiving. Both of these subjects

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[129] Brown (1967), 324.
[130] Cf. ch. 1 for a discussion of how Augustine's sermons create a context of knowledge and understanding, enabling their hearers to grow and progress.
[131] *en. Ps.* 123.1.

relate to questions of wealth and poverty and to the form of the Christian common life.

a. Ascent within the monastery

In his exposition of Ps. 132, Augustine takes the opening verse of the psalm, *See, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity*, as the cue for a sustained sermon on the monastic life.[132] The central, defining feature of such a life, as Augustine describes it, is its social quality, its reflection of the common life of the Apostles as described in Acts 4. This is emphasised, among other places, in the opening paragraphs of Augustine's monastic rule, where the brothers are enjoined to have one soul and heart and to hold all things in common,[133] honouring in one another the God 'whose temples you have become'.[134] As Zumkeller writes,

> Community is the cornerstone on which he built his form of monastic living... It is precisely here that the distinctive element in his conception of monastic community is to be found: community for him was a goal to be pursued for its own sake, not merely to serve some other end. To be of one heart and one soul toward God is for Augustinian monasticism the 'first thing for the sake of which' (*primum propter quid*), the chief object of the monastic common life.[135]

As Zumkeller and other writers emphasise, Augustine's emphasis upon the corporate gives his vision of monasticism a distinctive turn. Since the focus of community life is a network of dynamic relations between people, the community is not primarily held together by a particular apostolic or charitable purpose,[136] by institutional structures, nor indeed by a dominant authority figure. Bonner comments on the fact that the Augustinian superior (*praepositus*) is not styled 'abbot' and, while the monks are expected to honour and obey him,[137] he is more commonly seen as ministering to their needs.[138] Bonner compares Augustine's *Rule* with the sixth century Italian *Rule of the Master*, with its emphasis on the vertical relationships binding brothers to their superiors and

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[132] For Augustine's attitude to monastic life, cf. Lawless (1982); (1987); (2000); (2004); Van Bavel (1984); Zumkeller (1986)
[133] Cf. *reg.* 1.2-1.5.
[134] *reg.* 1.8.
[135] Zumkeller (1986), 126.
[136] Cf. Zumkeller (1986), 199.
[137] *reg.* 7.1.
[138] Cf. *reg.* 1.3; 5.3; 5.4; Bonner (2004), 66.

especially to the abbot, and its corresponding lack of interest in the horizontal relationships within the community. Bonner comments that,

> The Master stood in a tradition which found inspiration in the 'master and disciple' relationship of the Egyptian desert, in which the disciple put himself under an experienced monk and was expected to obey him without question, however extravagant his commands might be. Augustine, in contrast, starts from the bond of friendship among Christian souls, united by love of God and of one's neighbour. As a result the Augustinian *Rule* is not, and cannot be, authoritarian in the way that *The Rule of the Master* and the Benedictine Rule are authoritarian.[139]

In view of the strongly communitarian emphasis that Augustine uses to describe and proscribe monastic life, reflected in his *Rule*'s 'horizontal' grid of composition,[140] it might have been expected that he would leave far behind him any echo of the Plotinian ascent 'from the alone to the alone'. However, as the presence of *en. Ps.* 132 within this series of expositions implies, the theme of ascent, with its Plotinian echoes and influences, in fact strongly informs much of what Augustine has to say on this subject. There is perhaps a hint of this in the second paragraph of the *Rule*, where Augustine writes that 'you should have one soul and one heart (Acts 4:32) centred on God (*in Deum*)'. As Bonner comments, the movement implied by *in Deum* is vital to this passage. The brothers are to live a life of mutual love in the monastery. The community is central to their existence. And yet, mutual love and community do not exist for their own sake, but, like the journey of ascent, have a purpose, a direction, an impetus in the desire for God and the movement towards God.[141]

Central to the way in which Augustine retains and yet transforms Plotinian thought in this context is his striking re-interpretation of the key word, *monos*:

> *Monos* means 'one', but not any kind of 'one'. One person may be present in a crowd; he is 'one', but one with many others. He can be called 'one' but not *monos*, because *monos* means 'one alone'. But where people live together in such unity that they form a single individual, where it is true of them, as scripture says, that the have but one mind and one heart (Acts 4:32) –

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[139] Bonner (2004), 65-6.
[140] Cf. Lawless (2000), 151.
[141] Cf. Lawless (1987), 157; Van Bavel (1984), 45-6.

many bodies but not many minds, many bodies but not many hearts (*multa corpora, sed non multae animae; multa corpora, sed non multa corda*) – then they are rightly called *monos*, one alone.[142]

Given Augustine's emphasis on the sociability of the common life based upon Acts 4, it might be thought that he would have little use for the term *monos* and its cognates, with their seemingly inescapable connotations of the Plotinian 'flight of the alone to the alone'. However, far from simply dropping the term, Augustine radically re-defines it. As Lawless writes,

With the full force of his Trinitarian theology, Augustine gradually enriches and enlarges Plotinus' concepts of unity and multiplicity. Only in the company of others could he long for, desire, search, find, and love the beauty which he established as the goal for all adherents of the monastic Rule.[143]

In Augustine's hands, the term *monos*, far from denoting an individual journey, is given an entirely new, though related, meaning: it denotes the single heart and mind shared by the multiplicity of people living in the monastery and the single love of God that together they pursue amidst a multitude of competing calls for their attention. As Zumkeller writes,

For him, a 'monk' is not an individual person, living for himself alone, or one who is striving for his own personal perfection and sanctification;...he is no solitary whom the community is serving in some subordinate means. Rather, those men would be considered monks who through their harmonious living together have become, as it were a *monos*, that is, a single being, and possess only one heart and soul toward God (en. Ps. 132.6).[144]

Thus, the Plotinian concepts of unity and multiplicity have not disappeared. However, unity is now to be achieved not by a flight away from the social life of the world, but, rather, in the midst of that life. As Augustine describes it, a monk's brothers in the monastery are not simply spectators in the solitary drama of his individual soul, nor indeed are they, as for Cassian, simply rungs on the ladder up which he must climb to perfection, enabled, by his contact with them,

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[142] *en. Ps.* 132. 6. For discussion of this passage, cf. Lawless (1982), 526-39; (1987), 153-7; Van Bavel (1984), 44-5; Zumkeller (1986), 131-3.
[143] Lawless (1987), 157.
[144] Zumkeller, (1986), 132.

to test and improve his temper and self-restraint.[145] Rather, in the community where there are *multa corpora, sed non multae animae*, the progress of each individual soul is itself intimately bound up with that of the others. The challenge is, as Lawless puts it, 'seeing oneself in others, especially in one's enemy, rather than assuming the stance of a poseur who affects a particular lifestyle to impress others'.[146]

Monks are equipped for ascent, enabled to seek the heavenly city, not because they have cut themselves off from social ties, but, quite the opposite, because the social ties that exist in the community actually prepare them for the sociability of the City itself. As Markus writes,

> The community living in concord and singlemindedness, with all property shared, is Augustine's favoured model of the monastery. These are the qualities which make it a microcosm of the City of God. The most insidious form of pride, the root of all sin, was 'privacy', self-enclosure. The 'private' was the opposite of 'shared', 'common', 'public'; and the Heavenly City was the community in which full sharing would be had.[147]

Moreover, as Augustine emphasises in the Tractates on John's Gospel, when, like the first apostles or members of a monastery, a group of people enjoy a mutual love that makes 'one heart from many hearts', they mirror the life of God himself. For God the Father and God the Son enjoy perfect unity. They are, for Augustine, the ultimate example of two persons who are one: 'the word was God';[148] 'I and the Father are one'.[149] The source of the unity between the Father and the Son, the 'one of their love',[150] is the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit who pours love into the hearts of the faithful (Rom 5:5), who also draws the Father and the Son together in love. Community life can thus model, though always imperfectly, something of the perfect unity that exists between Father and Son:

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[145] Cf. Lawless (2004), 17.
[146] Lawless (2000), 152.
[147] Markus (1990), 78; cf. Madec (1994).
[148] Jn. 1:1, quoted in *Io. eu. tr.* 18.4.
[149] Jn. 10:30, quoted in *Io. eu. tr.* 20.3.
[150] *Io. eu. tr.* 20.3: *Pater et Filius charitate complexi, unusque charitatis Spiritus eorum est, ut fiat Trinitas Pater et filius*; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 9.8; 14.9; 18.4.

...if therefore, my soul and your soul, when we know the same thing and love each other, become one soul, how much more are God the Father and God the Son one God in the source of love.[151]

Thus, the themes of unity and multiplicity, so prominent in Plotinus, find a new context. They have ceased to become opposites, from one of which (multiplicity) human beings must fly in order to achieve the other (unity), and have become instead complementary. Human beings on the journey of ascent are called to a sociable lifestyle, in which many become one, and this finds its most vivid expression in the monastery.

b. Ascent within the Church

In his exegesis of Ps. 132:2, *Like fragrant oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard, Aaron's beard, the oil that flowed down to the border of his tunic*, Augustine explains that the oil of the Holy Spirit is poured upon the head (Christ) from whom it flows on to the beard (the martyrs) to the collar (the monasteries) of the tunic (the Church):

...just as when someone is dressing, his head enters through those borders at the top, so too in the case of brothers who dwell in unity. Christ, our head, enters through the borders of fraternal charity that he may be clothed: that is to say, so that he may have the Church clinging closely to him.[152]

Monastic life, like all Christian life, depends upon God's grace,[153] and the charity that the Spirit gives, which binds brothers together in unity in the monastery, is the same charity that is dispensed to the whole Church: Christ in his head and members. To be sure, charity is given in a particular order, as the oil trickles first over the beard and the collar. The martyrs and those living in monasteries have a pre-eminent role in the life of the Church, displaying charity in ways that are particularly direct, and imaging most transparently the unity-in-multiplicity of

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[151] *Io. eu. tr.* 18.4: *si ergo anima mea et anima tua: cum idem sapimus nosque diligimus, fit anima una: quanto magis Pater Deus et Filius Deus in fonte dilectionis Deus unus est?*

[152] *en. Ps.* 132. 9.

[153] Cf. *en. Ps.* 132.10: 'The psalmist wanted us to understand, brothers and sisters, that those who live as brothers in unity do so only through the grace of God. They do not achieve it by their own efforts, nor is it the result of their own merits; it is God's gift and comes to us by his grace, like dew from heaven.'

the Mystical Body.[154] However, there is ultimately only one charity and, indeed, only one Church. Essentially, that which is given to the martyrs and the monks is no different from that which is bestowed on the Body of Christ as a whole. Zumkeller stresses the importance of monasticism's responsibility towards the Church:

> As Augustine's conception of the Church matured toward the Pauline notion of the Mystical Body of Christ, so his ideals for monastic life became more deeply rooted in the idea of this Mystical Body. More and more he came to see monasticism as closely, organically related to the Church's entirety, and he perceived it clearly to be a member – indeed a vital member – of Christ's Body.[155]

Because there is only one charity and this is given to the entire Church, and not just one part of it, Augustine's vision of the monastic life is essentially non-élitist, devoid of a Manichee-style distinction between elect and hearers.[156] As Lawless writes, Augustine 'did not consider the acquiring of holiness to be the privilege only of monks and nuns, the preserve...of a few professional ascetics'.[157] Moreover, his assessment of the fallen condition of human beings makes it even less likely that he would idealise any particular group. As he says in the exposition, 'just as there are spurious clerics, and some among believers who do not deserve the name, so too there are bogus monks. All these three classes of people...have good and bad among them.'[158] Commenting on Ps. 147:12, *Sing united praise to the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise your God, O Zion*, Augustine tells his congregation, in words that echo his discussion of *monos*, that,

> Because there are many of us, we praise him all together, and because we are one, we praise him as one. The many are the same as the one, because he in whom we are one is himself always one, undivided.[159]

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[154] Cf. Zumkeller (1986), 111-2.
[155] Zumkeller (1986), 197.
[156] Zumkeller (1986), 104
[157] Lawless (2000), 151.
[158] *en. Ps.* 132. 9; cf. 99.12.
[159] *en. Ps.* 147.7.

Finding unity in the midst of multiplicity is not the preserve only of monks. All Christians are held together in a single charity and in the one body of Christ: 'all believers together form a single place for the Lord, for there is but one heart among all who are united in charity'.[160]

It follows from this that the call to realise ascent among other people is not restricted to those living in monasteries, but affects all who belong to the Church. In order to explore this further, it is helpful to examine Augustine's expositions of passages from two psalms that fall outside the series of Psalms of Ascent, Ps. 41 and Ps. 54, and the analysis that these have received from Rémy and McCarthy.

The use of Ps. 41, *As a deer longs for springs of water...*, by catechumens walking to the font,[161] expresses their desire for God, a desire that baptism ought to stimulate rather than quench, for 'if the candidates know where their pilgrimage is tending, and what that land is to which they must cross over, their longing will be kindled to even greater intensity'.[162] As the Psalmist weeps over the taunts of his enemies, Augustine, prompted by Ps 41:5, *I reflected upon these things and poured out my soul above myself*, describes his journey in terms that are familiar ones of ascent:

> I sought my God in visible, material creatures, and I did not find him. I sought the substance of him in myself, as though he were something like what I am, and did not find him there either; so I have become aware that my God is some reality above the soul. *I reflected upon these things and poured out my soul above myself* that I might touch him, for how could my soul ever attain what it seeks, the reality above the soul, unless it poured out itself above itself?[163]

This movement of vertical ascent could, Rémy comments, have made his quest a solitary and isolated one (the alone to the alone), were it not for the fact that, in the next passage of the exposition, he discovers that

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[160] *en. Ps.* 131.4.
[161] Cf. *en. Ps.* 41.1.
[162] *en. Ps.* 41.1.
[163] *en. Ps.* 41.8: *in corde enim habet locum Dominus; quia unum cor est omnium in charitate copulatorum.*

...he who has his most lofty home in a secret place has also a tent (*tabernaculum*) 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.[164]

The tent thus stands for three seemingly distinct things which, ultimately, turn out to be identical. It is, in the first place, the body of the incarnate Christ, who has descended to the earth. Secondly, it is the Church, the body of Christ on earth. Thirdly, the tent is an ante-room in which those on pilgrimage stay as they travel towards their ultimate destination, the house of God.[165] The Psalmist admires the lifestyle of the community that is gathered in the tent, the symbol of the pilgrim church: 'I marvel at bodily members enlisted for action under the soul that serves God',[166] and he finds that the life of this tent leads directly into the house of God: 'He climbed up to the tent, then arrived at God's house'.[167]

In line, therefore, with the earlier discussion of this subject, the goal of ascent is obtained through Christ who has descended to make his tent on the earth. Simultaneously, it is also obtained within the Church (also the body of Christ). It is these which make ascent possible, because they form the all-important bond between the ground and the divine heights of God's house.[168] Since the body of Christ is the means of his ascent, the Psalmist's journey does not take him, as it does not take monks in a monastery, *away* from others, but rather *towards* them. The end point of his journey is an 'everlasting party',[169] that he and other believers celebrate in the house of God. Participating in this communal celebration is what finally enables his soul to be poured out above itself. As Rémy concludes, 'for Augustine, the mystery of the ascension of the soul is not disjointed from its ecclesial milieu, whose sacramentality derives from him who is the sacrament *par excellence*: Christ the mediator'.[170]

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[164] *en. Ps.* 41.9.
[165] Cf. *en. Ps.* 26.2.6; 131.10.
[166] *en. Ps.* 41.9.
[167] *en. Ps.* 41.9: *ascendens tabernaculum, pervenit ad domum Dei.*
[168] Cf. Rémy (1991), 622.
[169] *en. Ps.* 41.9: *In domo Dei festivitas sempiterna est.*
[170] Rémy (1991), 623.

Some comparable comments are made by McCarthy in relation to *en. Ps.* 54.[171] Commenting on verse 6, Augustine tells his congregation that

> A desire for solitude does often arise in the mind of a servant of God from no other cause than a host of troubles and difficulties, so that he or she exclaims, *Who will give me wings as though to a dove? Then I will fly away and find rest.*[172]

> A desire to seek God in solitude, unhampered by the crushing demands of others, may be a particular issue for those entrusted with pastoral responsibilities, particularly if, like Augustine, they are of a contemplative turn of mind. They may wish, like the dove, for a type of ascent that will take them right out of all the cares and concerns of their office, away from all who cause them vexation and anxiety. For those afflicted in this way, the wilderness might seem to be a safe place of refuge, but even this proves deceptive, as Anthony himself discovered:

> Why do you suppose the desert places have been filled with God's servants, my brothers and sisters? If life among other people had suited them well, would they have withdrawn from others? Look what they are doing – they too! They flee as far away as they can, and live in the desert. But is each of them solitary there? By no means. Charity obliges them to stay with many companions, and among these multitudes are some who are a trial to them.[173]

Practically speaking, physical relocation to the desert is unlikely to be able to provide complete solitude: 'you cannot avoid the society of your brothers and sisters… You cannot separate yourself from the human race as long as you live the life of humankind.'[174] However, even if such solitude were possible, it would not be desirable, for charity insists on the importance of staying within the company of others. Thus, pastoral ministry or indeed any sort of life in the Christian community must involve coming to terms with those others, even at times when flight from them might seem to be desirable. They are inevitably

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[171] C. 408?; cf. Fiedrowicz (1997), 433.
[172] *en. Ps.* 54.8.
[173] *en. Ps.* 54.9.
[174] *en. Ps.* 54.9.

involved in the ascent and it cannot be understood as an escape from them. As McCarthy writes,

> ...like a dove, who is the very symbol of charity, the Christian is affectively attached to those from whom he or she would wish dissociation. Therefore, the dove does not fly away but stays so as to discharge its office of love, and accepts those who cause it to groan... [T]he dove does not withdraw from others but lives after the pattern of Christ, who included among his own twelve apostles one who would cause him suffering.[175]

Rather than wishing to escape from the ties of social and corporate life in the Church, these ties should, in fact, be embraced. As Augustine recounts in the *Confessions*, those who have been given much should, however much they may wish to escape from their obligations, be willing to give to others some of what they have received.

> Filled with terror by my sins and my load of misery, I had been turning over in my mind a plan to flee into solitude, but you forbade me, and strengthened me by your words. To this end Christ died for all, you reminded me, that they who are alive may live not for themselves, but for him who died for them... Your only Son, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud disparage me, for I am mindful of my ransom. I eat it, I drink it, I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled with it among those who are fed and feasted.[176]

Again, the pattern of Christ's descent in love, in the Incarnation, provides a blueprint for the Church's pastors: 'Christ came down from life to suffer death; the Bread came down, to hunger; the Way came down, on the way to weariness; the Fount came down, to thirst. Do you refuse to take work upon yourself?'[177] Common membership within Christ's body makes interaction with others a necessity. The final words of the exposition of Ps. 132 provide a reminder that, seen in Augustine's terms, ascent is not an escape from others, but a journey that is undertaken in their company, within the body of Christ:

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[175] McCarthy (2005), 44.
[176] *conf.* 10.43.70; cf. the description of Idithun in ch. 1.
[177] *s.* 78.6; cf. Zumkeller (1986), 197.

> Is it here on earth that you feel you are being crowded and trodden on? Then emigrate! Live in heaven! 'How can I live in heaven?' you will say. 'I am a human being of flesh and blood, given over to the flesh.' Let your heart race ahead to where you will follow it in body (*corde praecede, quo sequaris corpore*). Do not be deaf to the invitation, 'Lift up your hearts' (*sursum corda*). No one will tread on you in heaven.[178]

The liturgical allusion[179] in the final sentence implies that, ultimately, God's invitation to ascend is made not to solitary individuals but to the eucharistic community as a corporate entity. All are called to ascend together. And, as the passage indicates, the ascent is not only corporate but corporeal: not a flight away from the body but a journey in which the body will ultimately participate: the heart does indeed race ahead in love but the body will follow it. Ascent is achieved, in every respect, by and within the body rather than outside it or away from it.

The other side, perhaps, of this is that once it is firmly understood that ascent is a corporate and corporeal affair, then a renewed place for the solitary and the spiritual is opened up within it. Commenting on Ps. 54, *Lo, I fled far away and stayed in the desert*, Augustine, while dismissing the idea that the physical desert might be a place of solitude, asks

> Do you mean, perhaps the inner place of your own soul, where no other human being gains entry, where no one is with you, where there is only yourself and God? Well and good.[180]

Augustine's *Rule*, for all its emphasis on the importance of communal living, proscribes that an oratory be set apart, so that it is available for those who wish to pray there outside fixed hours.[181] As Zumkeller comments, '(i)t was for the sake of his monks' private prayer that Augustine had instituted oratories. He could not have shown better the importance that he attached to each monk's own piety'. And, as might be expected, such advice is not restricted to those living

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[178] *en. Ps.* 132. 13.
[179] On the use of the *sursum corda*, cf. *en. Ps.* 10.3; 39.28; 80.21; 103.1.14; *conf.* 12.16.23: Boulding (2000-4), 1: 162, n. 10; Lawless (2000), 149; Madec (1994), 148.
[180] *en. Ps.* 54.9.
[181] *reg.* 2.2.

the monastic life. The interior aspect of the journey of ascent continues to be important. As Halliburton argues, commenting on *en. Ps.* 54.10, in the face of the strong forces of the world, an interior flight, a *fuga saeculi*, is indeed sometimes necessary. In the face of such forces, the Christian should not panic:

> The one thing he can do is to withdraw, as it were, into himself, to find some measure of control in these circumstances, to find in fact the Christ within him who is as powerful to still the tempest in his own life as he was to subdue the waves on the lake of Galilee. 'Perhaps your ship is being troubled', he writes, 'on account of the fact that Christ is sleeping in you... [Y]our heart is troubled because you have forsaken him on whom you believed. If Christ does not come to your mind, then he is indeed sleeping. Awake him therefore, recall your faith and you will find that, if he is indeed watching within you, he will arise and rebuke the waves and there will be a great calm'.[182]

The practice of such interior withdrawal is, Halliburton argues, 'an effective and well-proven way of dealing with the *saeculum* – of travelling through it without being submerged in its waters, of living in it without running away from it, of "fleeing" from it without deserting it'. In other words, such interior withdrawal from the social life of the Church or the world is made not in order to escape from these but, rather, so as to be able to continue to live in them, and indeed re-engage with them more strongly. It does not, as Halliburton says, constitute 'taking of refuge from the company of men nor a denigrating of things material'.[183] Interior withdrawal provides moments of respite and self-reflection which, ultimately, strengthen rather than undermine, the fundamentally social and corporate nature of Christian ascent.

Augustine's own ministry as a monk-bishop perhaps demonstrates the ability to hold together the apostolic and contemplative in a single life, without either one predominating to the exclusion of the other.[184] But, the ultimate human exemplar here is St Paul, whose mystical experience in 1 Corinthians 12:1-6, Augustine discusses early in this series of expositions. Paul appears, as Augustine describes it, to have enjoyed an entirely successful ascent:

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[182] Halliburton (1967), 261; cf. *en. Ps.* 54.10.
[183] Halliburton (1967), 257.
[184] Cf. Lancel (2002), 224; Zumkeller (1986), 194-6.

> By going forth in his mind he had gone forth to God. Mentally leaving behind all human frailty, all the temporal concerns of this world, all the transient things that dwindle to nothing as they are born and sink into death, his heart dwelt in a contemplation that defied description.[185]

As with Christ in the Incarnation, the option may have been open to Paul to remain where he was, in the realms of contemplation, but he does not choose to stay there but returns in order to teach the realities he has learned, even if it is only possible to give imperfect expression to things that are 'beyond utterance':[186] Paul's mystical withdrawal has the ultimate effect of allowing him to fulfil the demands of charity by re-engaging all the more strongly with the Corinthians and helping them to come to the place that he has glimpsed in his ascent. This solitary experience of ascent is ultimately, then, a contribution to the corporate life and not to escape from it.

c. Ascent and almsgiving

> Our aim in expounding this psalm has been above all to encourage you to practise kindness, for that is the means whereby you will ascend, and, as you know, only those who are ascending can sing this Song of Steps.[187]

In his exposition of Psalm 125, Augustine comments in some detail on almsgiving, a familiar theme in both his own preaching and that of many of his forbears and contemporaries.[188] Finn explores a range of ways in which almsgiving was promoted in the early Church in ascending order of importance: poetry (such as Prudentius's *Psychomachia*); letters (such as those of Isidore of Pelusium); treatises (such as the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement of Alexandria's *Quis dives Salvetur?* and, highly influential on Augustine, Cyprian's *De Opere et Eleemosynis)*; and apocryphal Acts of the Martyrs and Saints' Lives, in which the generosity of saints such as Antony and Martin are

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[185] *en. Ps.* 119.2.
[186] 1 Cor. 12:4.
[187] *en. Ps.* 125.15: *Isto psalmo exhortati vos fuerimus maxime ad faciendam misericordiam, quia hinc ascenditur; et videtis quia ille cantat canticum graduum*; cf. *en. Ps.* 102.14.
[188] Cf. Finn (2006), 146. Finn calculates that almsgiving was promoted in roughly one fifth of Augustine's sermons and is, therefore, more prominent than his promotion of asceticism, or virginity and the monastic life.

held up as an example of generosity to a popular audience.[189] Above all. however, Finn argues, it was primarily through the medium of sermons that bishops were able to encourage almsgiving, and indeed, to deliver moral exhortation on other subjects as well. 'Preaching', Finn writes, 'was regarded as the basic way in which Christian teaching, moral and doctrinal, was communicated to the faithful.'[190] Augustine himself remarks in the *City of God* that, while sermons delivered in Christian churches frequently exhort people to avoid avarice, pagans have no such forum in which they can receive such moral instruction.[191]

Preaching on almsgiving was thus, Finn argues, a distinctive characteristic of Christian life in the fourth and fifth centuries. In addition to furthering the work of the gospel, the promotion of almsgiving could also serve to consolidate the position of the bishop. Success in collecting alms could enhance his status at the centre of the Christian community, as a patron and dispenser of gifts.[192] Moreover, in the aftermath of persecution, the collected funds would often enable the construction of an impressive basilica, whose presence would mark the distinct identity and permanence of the Church within a particular area and provide an impressive arena in which the bishop could preside at the celebration of the liturgy.[193] Moreover, as was discussed in the previous chapter, almsgiving to the Church could be construed by the bishops as a new form of civic evergetism, potentially diverting money away from more traditional forms, such as contributions to games and theatrical shows, although in practice, '(m)any Christians adopted almsgiving as an additional form of generosity rather than as a replacement to older forms of euergetism'.[194]

The importance of almsgiving in episcopal preaching in the fourth and fifth centuries, and, it appears, its particular importance to Augustine does not necessarily explain the presence of an extended passage on the subject in his expositions of the Psalms of Ascent. However, as will be argued below, there

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[189] Finn (2006), 116-137.
[190] Finn (2006), 137.
[191] *ciu.* 2.6.
[192] Cf. Finn (2006), ch. 2.
[193] Cf. Finn (2006), 12-14.
[194] Finn (2006), 208.

are in fact a number of separate, but interrelated strands that link the seemingly mystical theology of ascent to a pastoral theology about the importance of giving alms.

i. Creation

Commenting on Ps 127:5, *May the Lord bless you from Zion, and may you see the good things that belong to Jerusalem*, Augustine takes up a theme that was discussed in the earlier discussion of ascent: that of Jerusalem as a city of pure and unchanging being, at unity with itself, standing in contrast with the temporal order of change and flux:

> May the Lord console you, then, and grant you to see the good things of Jerusalem. Good things that *are* indeed. Why do we say they *are*? Because they are eternal. Why do we say of them that they *are*? Because in that country the King is he who says, I AM WHO I AM (Ex 3:14). The other goods, the earthly ones, both are and are not: for they cannot stand. They slide away and dissolve.[195]

Because the nature of Jerusalem is what it is, the theme of ascent to God is closely linked in with that of creation from nothing.[196] The historical/eschatological journey that the pilgrims make towards their heavenly homeland in Jerusalem is more or less identical with an existential journey that they make towards or away from their creator. The success, or otherwise, of an ascent to God thus depends upon a right attitude to the created order. Such an attitude would not, of course, be a Manichee-style rejection of the created world but, rather, an acknowledgment, in the terms of *De Doctrina Christiana*, that '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'.[197] The tendency of fallen humanity, calling a tree 'father' and a rock 'mother', is to turn away from God rather than towards him.[198] 'Sin, for Augustine,' comments Madec, 'is an ontological decay, as it consists in turning away from God who is Being and, in an absurd way, trying to

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[195] *en. Ps.* 127.15: *Consoletur ergo te Dominus, ut uideas bona Jerusalem. Illa enim bona sunt. Quare sunt? Quia aeterna sunt. Quare sunt? Quia ibi est rex, Ego sum qui sum (Ex 3:14). Ista vero bona sunt, et non sunt: non enim stant; labuntur fluunt.*
[196] This theme is discussed in Harrison (2006), ch. 4 and Madec (1994).
[197] *doc. chr.* 1.4.4.
[198] Cf. Jer. 2:27. These remarks are suggested in Boulding (2000-4), 6: 70, n. 7.

find this being in that which is only becoming'.[199] Such an ontological decay affects Augustine's father, Patricius, in book two of the *Confessions*, when, seeing evidence of his son's physical development at a visit to the baths, he begins to hope for earthly grandchildren and becomes intoxicated by admiration for the creation, rather than the creator and is consequently 'dragged down to the depths'. By contrast, Monica, recounts Augustine, 'saw the twisted paths I followed, those paths trodden by people who turn their backs to you, not their faces'.[200]

Like Monica, those who hope to ascend to the heavenly city that is 'Being in itself' will turn their faces towards God, in an attitude of created dependence. Those who, like Patricius, are descending, turn towards the created world and away from God, failing to acknowledge their creation from nothing.

As Augustine comments in his prefatory remarks to the exposition of Ps. 125, human beings groan in their temporal state. The decisive difference comes when Christ, through his incarnation, resurrection and ascension, inhabits mortal flesh in order to save the members of his Body. Christ, by his own entry into the created order, enables members of the Church to turn towards God; to face away from the creation, and towards its creator; away, effectively, from Babylon and towards Jerusalem.

> All this was done so that we might be converted to God. We had no hope except as directed toward the world. Hence we were wretched, and twice-wretched because in this life we not only had our faces turned toward the world but we also had our backs to God. But once the Lord has turned us round so that we begin to face toward God and thrust the world behind our backs, then, although we are still wayfarers, we are tending toward our homeland.[201]

Such an attitude connects with the subject of almsgiving because those who hoard their riches, who invest an inappropriate value in them, who seek to enjoy rather than use them, thereby orientate themselves in fundamentally the wrong direction. By looking to created things, rather than to the God who has created

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[199] Madec (1994), 141.
[200] *conf.* 2.3.6.
[201] *en. Ps.* 125.2.

these, they set themselves on a course that leads away from their heavenly homeland in Jerusalem: 'you ascend by loving God and fall by loving the world'.[202] Divesting him or herself of riches enables a Christian 'to walk more lightly, during the pilgrimage of this life, on that path which leads to the country where God Himself is the true riches'.[203] Augustine reflects on people who argue that God should not have made people poor, that they would have been better off acknowledging the created nature of themselves and those things in which they repose value:

> How much better would it be for such a critic to be poor himself, but to be God's property, knowing that his riches flow from God! How much better for him to follow the will of God, view his poverty as temporal and transient, and all the while look forward to spiritual wealth that cannot possibly melt away! Then his riches would consist of faith in the heart, even if there were no gold in his treasure-chest. If he did store gold there he would need to beware of thieves and might lose it against his will; but he never loses faith from his heart unless he has chosen to expel it.[204]

Those who give alms generously, in 'their refusal to set much store by the fleeting things of time, and their love for things eternal',[205] betray a wider conviction about where true value resides. They understand that 'all these things pass and flow away and that they brought nothing with them into this world and will take nothing out of it'.[206] Their sitting-light to material possessions represents a fundamental orientation towards the creator rather than the creation, towards being rather than nothingness, and, therefore, sets them simultaneously on a journey of ascent towards the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which is Being Itself.

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[202] *en. Ps.* 126.1: *amando Deum ascendis; amando saeculum, cadis.*
[203] *ciu.* 5.18; cf. Zumkeller (1986), 146.
[204] *en. Ps.* 124.2.
[205] *en. Ps.* 126.1: *in contemptu temporalium, in charitate aeternorum.*
[206] *en. Ps.* 132.4: *illa omnia praetereunt et praeterfluunt, quia nihil attulit in hanc mundum, nihil potest de mundo auferre.*

ii. Christ

Often a beggar looking for a coin sings God's commands to you at the front door. [207]

Finn and Ramsey both draw attention to the way in which Christian promotion of almsgiving in the fourth and fifth centuries 'facilitated a multiple redescription of the destitute'.[208] A number of factors, Finn argues, contributed to this redescription. One of these was the concept of almsgiving as an 'exchange of goods' in which the donor won forgiveness through prayers offered by the poor in exchange for alms. As Finn notes, Ambrose interprets Paul's advice in 2 Cor. 8:14, that material goods should be balanced out over time by communities whose financial fortunes might vary, as being an exchange of spiritual for material goods. Thus, he tells his congregation that 'the [rich] people's prosperity should work well to meet the others' need of food and the spiritual wealth of those others should address the need of spiritual merit in the people and confer a favour on them'.[209] A further theme in the redescription of the destitute was an increasing tendency of Christian preachers to compare the donor/recipient relationship with that between friends or parents and their offspring.[210] Above all, perhaps, was the increasing identification of the poor with Christ.[211]

In taking up this final theme, Augustine draws on Cyprian's treatise on almsgiving, *De Opere et Eleemosynis*.[212] In this work, Cyprian teaches that almsgiving aids fasting and prayer,[213] and that it is efficacious for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin, since 'by almsgiving people are freed not only from the second but also from the first death.'[214] Above all, however, Cyprian establishes the identification of Christ with the poor, based on Mt. 25:31-46, as a key theme

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[207] *s.* 32.23; cf. Finn (2006), 175.
[208] Finn (2006), 182.
[209] *De Officiis* 1.30.153, quoted in Finn (2006), 180-7.
[210] Cf. Finn (2006), 180-7.
[211] On the identification of Christ and the poor, cf. Ramsey (1982), 226-30.
[212] c. AD 252.
[213] *de op. et eleem.* 5.
[214] *de op. et eleem.* 6; cf. Tabitha in Acts 9:36-40; cf. Hinchliff (1974), 60: 'In his treatise *De Opere et Eleemosynis* [Cyprian]...maintained that good works such as almsgiving could atone for sins committed after baptism. The treatise was almost certainly written early in Cyprian's life as a Christian bishop and its argument is part and parcel of his cut-and-dried (and unattractive) theology of church and ministry.'

in Christian exhortation to almsgiving. To the question of how to avoid being weighed down by excessive amounts of money, Cyprian gives a Christological answer:

> Divide your returns with God; share your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner in your earthly possessions, that he also may make you co-heir of his Heavenly Kingdom'.[215]

When it comes to the disposal of money, almsgiving can even claim a priority over family ties, since money given in alms is money given to God. Thus, alms should not be held back, even because people want to leave money to their children:

> ...by almsgiving to the poor God is made our debtor, and when it is given to the least it is given to Christ, there is no reason for anyone preferring earthly things to heavenly, nor placing human things before divine.[216]

Like other preachers, such as Ambrose, Gaudentius and, indeed, Pelagius,[217] Augustine draws on Cyprian's identification of Christ with the poor. 'Give to your needy brother', he instructs his congregation; 'Who is this brother? Christ.'[218] In a striking image in his exposition of Ps. 38, he compares the process of almsgiving to that of storing some wine or oil in a friend's cistern. The cistern is connected to pipes and conduits so that when the wine or oil is poured into it, the liquid might appear to have drained away but is, in fact, safely stored away for the future. So also, money given to the poor may appear to have drained away for ever and yet will be eschatologically revealed to have been given to Christ and thus stored up in heaven.[219]

It is in the perhaps more distinctive Christology of *en. Ps.* 125 that the link between ascent and almsgiving is most directly made. Augustine's conclusion to this exposition begins with an exhortation to kindness and mutual generosity as

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[215] *de op. et eleem.* 13.
[216] *de op. et eleem.* 16: *Si enim Deus eleemosynis pauperum fœneratur, et cum datur minimis Christo datur, non est quod quis terrena cœlestibus praeferat nec divinis humana praeponat.*
[217] Cf. Ramsey (1982), 227.
[218] en. Ps. 147.13.
[219] *en. Ps.* 38.12; cf. 40.2; cf. *s.* 60.7, cited in Ramsey (1982), 247-8.

the means by which ascent will take place. However, the emphasis soon shifts away from the congregation's status as potentially generous almsgivers. and towards seeing them as needy and fallen individuals, themselves in need of generosity:

> Remember this, you must not be content to sink down and not mount upward (*nolite amare descendere et non ascendere*); you must think hard about ascending, because someone who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among robbers. If he had not descended, he would not have fallen into the robbers' hands. Adam had already descended and fallen among robbers, and Adam is all of us.[220]

As Augustine re-tells and glosses the parable of the Good Samaritan,[221] he tells his congregation that fallen humanity has descended through pride and lies helpless. But Christ the good Samaritan passed by. As with all Augustine's thinking about ascent, it is Christ's intervention that makes the crucial difference. As has been seen earlier, Christ, through his descent in love in the Incarnation, and by the extension of this in the 'tent' of the Church, gives a means of ascent to fallen human beings, a place in the ante-room to the heavenly city itself. It is this which provides the crucial means of ascent, and which initiates a whole new dispensation, at the centre of which are love of God and neighbour, indivisibly joined.

> He tended us, hoisted us onto his beast by uniting himself to us in the flesh and took us to the inn, which represents the Church. He entrusted us to the innkeeper, who stands for the apostle, and gave two denarii for our cure: charity toward God and charity toward our neighbour, for on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.[222]

By contrast with Cyprian and others, then, almsgiving becomes less a matter of an 'exchange of gifts', either with one's neighbour or indeed with God.[223]

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[220] *en. Ps.* 125.15.
[221] Lk. 10:30-7.
[222] *en. Ps.* 125.15; cf. 121.5; *doctr. chr.* 1.30.31-33; cf. Bonner (1970), 560 for a discussion of Augustine's use of the parable of the Good Samaritan.
[223] Although it does sometimes carry this sense; cf. Burnaby (1938), 133-4. Burnaby strikes a sharp note of criticism when he discusses Augustine's adoption of Cyprian's view of almsgiving as efficacious for the removal of post-baptismal sins. 'Here as elsewhere,' he comments, 'his teaching is most un-Christian when he is assured of following both tradition and Scripture.' Augustine, Burnaby argues, has falsely conflated Mt. 25 and the Lucan Lord's Prayer and forced

Rather, it is about recognising the gratuitous generosity of Christ the good Samaritan towards fallen humanity: 'all this has been done for us'.[224] Fallen human beings have ultimately no counters with which to bargain, no goods that they can exchange. They can never, in Cyprian's terms, make God their debtor.[225] Rather, as Hombert puts it, humans are eternally the debtors.[226] Any possibility of ascent to God depends on the recognition of the utter gratuity of Christ's action. The picture of the almsgiver as a generous benefactor who gives to Christ in the person of the poor is replaced by that of a fallen human being who, scooped up from his parlous state by Christ, is initiated into God's life of love and commanded to 'go and do likewise'.[227] Thus, ascent to God is indeed by kindness,[228] but this kindness entirely rests on Christ's prior action – his kindness makes it possible.

iii. Love of neighbour

A further aspect of Augustine's particular contribution to reflection on almsgiving is that he frequently presents the subject not as a discrete thing in itself, but simply as a sub-set of all the many actions that demonstrate love of neighbour. Augustine appears in this respect to contrast with Cyprian, writing in *De Opere et Eleemosynis*,[229] who, whilst situating almsgiving within a wider family of works of justice and mercy, nevertheless sees it as having a fairly specific meaning: giving money to the poor with the conscious aim of purging post-baptismal sins:

> For when the Lord had come and healed the wounds which Adam had borne and had cured the old poisons of the serpent, He gave him when made whole a law not to sin any more lest

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Cyprian's interpretation upon the latter text, so that 'Forgive and it shall be forgiven you: give and it shall be given to you' has become 'Give and it shall be forgiven you'. 'It is amazing,' Burnaby remarks, 'that he could fail to see how grossly he was distorting the simplicity of Christ's words'. The result, as Burnaby characterises it, is a 'Christian usury' in which the rich give money to the poor not out of love but in order to secure benefits for themselves and he concludes in a footnote that '[n]o real defence of Augustine is possible in this matter'. Cf. Burnaby (1938), 133-4; on 'pious usury', cf. Ramsey (1982), 228.

[224] *en. Ps.* 125.15.

[225] Cf. *de op. et eleem.* 16, quoted above.

[226] Hombert (1998), 234. Hombert comments that there is a sense in which God can be called man's debtor, but not because God has borrowed anything from man, but because of what He has promised him. Hombert cites *s.* Dolbeau 4.6; *Io. eu. tr.* 3.10; *en. Ps.* 102.7; *conf.* 9.13.34.

[227] Lk. 10:37.

[228] Cf. *en. Ps.* 125.15, quoted above.

[229] Cf. Burnaby (1938), 133 on Cyprian's influence on Augustine on this subject.

something more serious happen to him in sinning. We were restricted and shut within a narrow limit by the prescription of innocence. And the infirmity of human frailty would have no resource nor accomplish anything, unless again divine goodness came to the rescue and by pointing out the works of justice and mercy opened a way to safeguard salvation. so that by almsgiving we may wash away whatever pollutions we later contract.[230]

Thus, for Cyprian, in the light of humanity's inability to keep the law, God has given in almsgiving a new and fairly specific way to regain our lost innocence. While Augustine retains Cyprian's teaching that almsgiving is able to purge small daily sins, particularly when combined with prayer and fasting[231] (with the proviso that this should not be interpreted as a license to continue doing wrong),[232] he points out, in *en. Ps.* 125, that almsgiving can take a variety of forms, not all of them, by any means, related to financial well-being:

It can happen that even a rich person finds himself poor in some respect, and a poor person may have the opportunity to help him. Imagine some traveller arriving at a river. His rich lifestyle has left him delicate, and he is unable to make the crossing. If he stripped off his clothes to cross he would catch cold and be ill and die. But a poor man comes along. His body is inured to hardship and he carries the rich man over: he is giving alms to the rich man.[233]

Finn writes that 'Christian promoters of almsgiving sought to integrate emotion and action, stressing right intention, motive, and manner of acting'.[234] This, as Finn's comment suggests, particularly characterises Augustine's attitude to the subject.[235] With a focus not on the action of almsgiving itself, but on the love that animates the will of those who do it – or fail to do it – Augustine is led radically to widen out what he means by almsgiving. Far from being the quite specific activity of giving money to the poor, almsgiving potentially comes to include almost the entirety of the Christian life. It can be almost any action that demonstrates love of neighbour. The point is particularly strongly made in the *Enchiridion*, where a huge list of activities, including, perhaps surprisingly,

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[230] *de op. et eleem.* 1.
[231] *s.* 9.17, 43.1, cited in Gonzalez, 217.
[232] *ciu.* 21.27; cf. Fitzgerald (1999b), 557.
[233] *en. Ps.* 125. 12.
[234] Finn (2006), 189.
[235] Several of Finn's references in this section are from Augustine; cf. also Ramsey (1982), 240-1.

subjecting somebody to the whip, can be characterised as almsgiving, so long as they are charitably motivated:

> ...the Lord's words 'Give alms, and everything is clean for you' (Lk 11:41) applies to any work of mercy that benefits somebody. Not only somebody who offers food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the traveller, asylum to the refugee, a visit to the sick or the prisoner, redemption to the captive, support to the weak, guidance to the blind, comfort to the sorrowful, medicine to the unwell, a path to the wanderer, advice to the uncertain, or whatever is necessary to a person in need, but also one who offers pardon to the sinner, is giving alms. And one who uses the whip to correct somebody over whom he has power, or disciplines him in some way, and yet puts away from his heart that person's sin by which he has been hurt or offended, or prays that it may be forgiven him, is giving alms not only through forgiveness and prayer, but also in reproof and correction by some punishment, for thus he is showing mercy... So there are many kinds of alms, and when we do them we receive help for the forgiveness of our sins.[236]

Moreover, since love is the key to almsgiving, the ability to give alms can be seen to be almost entirely unrelated to the actual wealth or otherwise of the donor and recipient. 'Charity is not something that can be doled out of your wallet.'[237] Thus, Augustine provides, as Fitzgerald remarks, 'a way to treat the invitation to give alms that can be honoured by rich and poor alike',[238] and, in this respect, contrasts with Cyprian, whose comments would seem to be mainly relevant to the rich.[239] Again, the important factor is not so much the particular action that is undertaken but, rather, whether or not love lies behind it: 'Perhaps you lack the resources? Never mind: you have the will';[240] 'if charity exists alone and has no goods to distribute to the poor, let it simply love and give only a cup of cold water'.[241] Augustine remarks that Zacchaeus, who gives away his considerable possessions in Lk. 19, and the widow who puts two small coins into the treasury in Lk. 21, have widely different financial resources, but they are united as true

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[236] *ench.* 72.
[237] *en. Ps.* 103.1.19: *charitas non de saccello erogatur.*
[238] Fitzgerald (1999b), 560; cf. Ramsey (1982), 256.
[239] Cf. *de op. et eleem.* 14-15.
[240] *en. Ps.* 125.11.
[241] *en. Ps.* 121.11.

almsgivers by the charity that motivates their wills.[242] Pride and humility may be found in both rich and poor alike.[243]

Thus, it is perhaps the case that something far more complex takes the place of what, for some writers, is simply conceived as an 'exchange of gifts' between a rich donor and a poor recipient: alms in exchange for prayers.[244] For Augustine, the Church operates as a forum within which love of neighbour is demonstrated in the almost infinitely complex patterns of giving and receiving that continually take place within it at many different levels. And, as has already been seen, such patterns involve not just financial matters, but a whole series of other gifts as well. It is the constant giving and receiving of these in charity that hold the body of Christ together, as well as human beings' constant – and entirely undeserving – receipt of good things from God. Individuals belong to the body by taking their place in this nexus of relationships:

> Even now, while we are talking to you, my brothers and sisters, you are like poor people in relation to us. Because God has graciously given to us, we in turn give to you from our store, and all of us receive from him who alone is rich. This is how the body of Christ holds together. Its members are neighbours to one another, knit together and united by the bond of peace, as each one, rich in some respect, gives to another what he lacks – some good thing in which that other is poor. This is how you must cherish one another. Take this as a pattern for your mutual love. Do not restrict your concern to yourselves, but have a care for the needs of those around you.[245]

Not only does charity towards one's neighbour hold the Church together, but, importantly in this context, it is also vital to any successful ascent. The heavenly Jerusalem that is the goal of the journey is the place where the patterns of giving and receiving and the love of neighbour that they demonstrate are brought to perfection:

> In what does the peace of Jerusalem consist? In the conjunction of corporal works of mercy with spiritual works of preaching, so that in both giving and receiving there may be peace.[246]

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[242] Cf. *en. Ps.* 32.3.22; 54.14; 121.11.
[243] *en. Ps.* 131.26; 132.4.
[244] Cf. Finn (2006), 180-2.
[245] *en. Ps.* 125.13.
[246] *en. Ps.* 121.9: *ut opera misericordiae corporalia jungantur operibus praedicationis spiritualibus, et fiat pax dando et accipiendo.*

As pilgrims make their way towards Jerusalem, they show their loyalty to the heavenly city by participating, albeit imperfectly, in the pattern of giving and receiving that the heavenly city perfectly exemplifies. The holy love of the pilgrims which has its vertical dimension in the journey that they make towards Jerusalem has also an inescapable horizontal dimension in the love that is shown in the human community. Thus, in an entirely un-Plotinian way, charity towards one's neighbour becomes a vital part of the journey of ascent: without such love, ascent would not be possible.

Ascent to God, it was argued at the start of this chapter, is a matter of the orientation towards God of the will, the soul and the affections of the heart. In his teaching on monasticism, on pastoral ministry, on almsgiving, and, indeed, on the entire life of the Church, it is clear that such an orientation is, for Augustine, inseparable from an orientation towards one's neighbour: love has a double face.

Conclusion

Augustine's teaching on almsgiving suggests perhaps two related questions. The first concerns the heavy emphasis that, it has been argued, Augustine places upon the psychological condition of the donor, the springs of his motivation, the condition of his will.[247] The question is whether, by subsuming the practice of almsgiving so entirely under the general heading of love of neighbour, Augustine runs the risk of evacuating it of some of its specific content and purpose. Since it appears that any act of kindness and even some things that would normally be thought of as *un*kind can, so long as they are done with love, qualify as alms deeds, where does this leave the particular action of the rich giving money to the poor? Moreover, it sometimes seems that the conditions of being rich and poor themselves are almost psychologised out of existence: a humble rich man is truly poor; a beggar puffed up with pride is truly rich: 'God's poor are poor in their minds, not in their purses... All the humble in heart, all who are established in

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[247] Cf. Ramsey (1982), 252-5.

twofold charity, whatever they may own in this world, are counted by God as his poor, the poor whom he satisfies with bread.'[248]

A further question arises in the relationship between the two expositions that have been particularly covered in this chapter, and how successful Augustine is in relating the richly corporate vision of the common life of Christians, as expressed in *en. Ps.* 132, to the question of almsgiving, as discussed in *en. Ps.* 125. It has been argued in relation to *en. Ps.* 132 that the model of Acts 4:32, while taken to refer specifically to monastic life, is one that Augustine consistently understands to be not just for an élite but one that the whole Church is called to follow. Lawless argues that Augustine's *Rule*, with its 'spiritual communism', its insistence on the importance of a common life and shared possessions,[249] is aimed not only at those living the monastic life but, rather, 'at directing the path of any group of Christians who wish to enter into a voluntary association'.[250]

Yet, when it comes to his preaching on almsgiving, both in *en. Ps.* 125 and elsewhere, the extent to which Augustine gives cash value to the assertion that Acts 4:32 supplies a basis for the common life of all Christians might be questioned. Despite his admittedly frequent preaching on almsgiving, and his theoretical commitment to the lifestyle of the first apostles as the basis of life for all Christians, the net result of Augustine's teaching on almsgiving seems to be that there should be very little social change. He conspicuously does not, like Ambrose[251] or the Pelagian author of *De diuitiis*,[252] stand out radically against the rich or indeed carry his corporate teaching through into suggestions about how the crucial verse in Acts might actually supply a model for Christians outside the monastery. In a rare moment of discussing the actual detail of the sums that might be given, Augustine's advice is that they should set aside a tenth of their income since this is what even the Pharisees managed and Christians

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[248] *en. Ps.* 131.26: *pauper Dei in animo est, non in sacculo...*
[249] Cf. Madec (1994), 224-230.
[250] Lawless (2000), 151.
[251] Cf. Brown (1967), 251.
[252] Cf. Ramsey (1999), 880. This work was discussed in ch. 2.

should be able to do better, even though, in practice, they frequently do worse.[253] Readjustment of existing social arrangements is not anticipated. Ramsey writes that,

> Neither in Augustine nor anywhere else in the literature of the mainstream is it suggested that the wealthy should impoverish themselves for the sake of the poor. In fact, it would be wrong to give away everything, or nearly everything, that one owned without taking into consideration the needs of oneself and one's dependents.[254]

Different scholars provide diverging insights into what might lie behind the perhaps disappointing conservatism of Augustine's teaching on almsgiving. For Gonzalez, the problem lies in his failure to break free from his Roman legal upbringing.[255] Brown, by contrast, argues that the need to maintain the unity of the Catholic Church against threats from the Donatists provides a disincentive to emphasise disparities of wealth within his congregation.[256] Ramsey speculates that a radical interpretation of the call to give alms might, in practice, be used as an excuse for giving nothing at all.[257] Perhaps, also, Augustine's continual awareness of the radically mixed nature of his congregation makes him fundamentally pessimistic that anything more than a regular call to generosity in almsgiving is likely to meet with very much success.

However, surely eschatological factors are also significant here. Daley makes a helpful comparison between Augustine and two of his contemporaries. On the one hand, the writer, possibly Evodius, of the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, in contrast to Augustine's own agnosticism about the time of the world's end,[258] warns about the imminence of the Lord's return and the need, in the light of it, for radical social change. On the other hand, Orosius, writing at Augustine's own invitation in his *Historia adversus paganos*, adulterates his

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[253] *en. Ps.* 146.17 (409-11?); cf. Gonzalez (1990), 219.
[254] Ramsey (1999), 879.
[255] Gonzalez (1990), 221.
[256] Brown (1967), 250.
[257] Ramsey (1982), 234.
[258] Cf. *en. Ps.* 6.2; Daley (1991), 134.

mentor's argument in the *City of God*, by identifying the eschatological city with the historical institutions of the Roman state.[259]

By contrast with Evodius, Augustine does not expect an imminent end to the world and, while anticipating that things will be very different in the future,[260] for the present, accepts the social arrangements of a fallen world. It is this that surely lies at the root of his cautious approach to almsgiving. Yet, on the other hand, by contrast with Orosius, the constant rhetoric of the expositions of the Psalms of Ascent, with their emphasis on the pilgrims' journey in love to the heavenly city, implies a far more radical and subversive statement than is ever explicitly made. As has been argued above, Augustine presents in these expositions a stark choice to his congregation: loving one city and pressing towards it necessarily implies turning one's back on the other; being fuelled in the journey by one type of love implies rejecting another. Current social arrangements do indeed have their importance and they demand allegiance for the present.[261] But the life of the heavenly city, towards which the pilgrims travel, and for which they long, will be marked by the rejection of all that is private and personal. Its citizens will enjoy 'a love that rejoices in a common and immutable good: a love...that makes one heart out of many because it is the perfectly concordant obedience of charity'.[262]

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[259] Cf. Daley (1991), 150-2.
[260] Cf. *en. Ps.* 125.14, quoted above; *en. Ps.* 6.1-2; Markus (1970), 20.
[261] Cf. *ciu.* 19.26; cf. *en. Ps.* 124.7.
[262] *ciu.* 15.3; cf. *s.* 236.3, cited in Ramsey (1982), 238.

Chapter Four

THE WORK OF LOVE

Augustine on the Life of Grace in the Expositions of Psalm 118

Introduction

In his expositions of Ps. 118, Augustine takes his pastoral theology down to the deepest level, articulating in detail his understanding of the human person living under grace, an understanding that lies beneath many of the issues that have so far been explored. His extended preface to this set of expositions repays close attention because, from the outset, it alerts us to themes that will be central to the way that Augustine understands the psalm and expounds it for his congregation:

> With the Lord's gracious help, I have expounded as best I could all the other psalms contained in the book which, as we all know, is by the Church's custom called the Psalter. I have done so partly in sermons to the people, and partly by dictation. But always I put off the exposition of Psalm 118, not so much because of its formidable length as because of its profundity, which few can fathom. My brethren took it badly that this psalm alone should lack an exposition in our insignificant writings, inasmuch as it too belongs to the collection of psalms; and they pressed me insistently to discharge the debt. But for a long time I did not yield to their requests or even to their commands, because every time I tried to think about it, it always seemed far beyond the powers of my mind. The plainer it seems, the more profound does it appear to me, so much so that I cannot even demonstrate how profound it is. When in other psalms some passage presents difficulty, at least the obscurity itself is obvious, even though the meaning is hidden; but in this psalm not even the obscurity is evident, for on the surface the psalm is so simple that it might be thought to require a reader or listener only, not an expositor.
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> Now at long last I approach the task of dealing with it, but I have absolutely no idea what I can manage. All the same, I trust that God will be with me and will help me, for he has done on all those occasions when I have sufficiently expounded matters which at first had seemed to me difficult or almost impossible to understand. I have decided to tackle it in public sermons, which the Greeks call homilies. I think this is the fairest way, because then church congregations will not be denied comprehension of this psalm. They are accustomed to enjoy the sound of it when it is sung, as they do with other psalms.[1]

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[1] *en. Ps.* 118, *Proœm.*

In the first place, the preface draws attention to the fact that this is the last of the *Enarrationes*, completing Augustine's commentaries on the Psalter, whether preached or written. The exact date of the expositions of Ps. 118 is a matter of scholarly debate: the earliest is AD 416 (Rondet), but the consensus of opinion points to a later date, around 422.[2] One important set of reasons for a later dating of the exposition revolves around the sense that the account of the moral life that Augustine gives here appears to be the fruit of mature reflection upon the issues of the Pelagian controversy.[3] Moreover, the measured tone of the expositions reflects the fact that the opportunity to preach on Ps. 118 enables Augustine to present a constructive rather than polemical explanation of his theology of grace.[4] As Martin comments, it allows him to take 'all of the hard-fought theological principles of the Pelagian controversy and turn them into living precepts for making progress in grace'.[5] This group of expositions thus covers many of the bitterly contested points of contention between the two sides in the Pelagian controversy, above all the need for grace, and the impossibility of fulfilling God's commandments without grace, but this is done in a pastoral context, where the concern is not to argue a point, but to explicate how this theological approach may be made habitable and practical, so that it can be lived out in the life of individual men and women.

In this preface, Augustine draws attention to the pressure exerted upon him by his brothers (*fratres mei*) as being the immediate cause of his decision to address this new and daunting psalm. The intention of providing spiritual and intellectual sustenance for these brothers (presumably, in this context, his brother clerics in the community in Hippo and/or his brother bishops)[6] gives these expositions a distinctive flavour. Martin writes of Augustine having 'undertaken a decidedly scholarly and sophisticated approach to the biblical text,

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[2] Cf. Fiedrowicz (1997), 437; Kannengeiser (1962), 360; Martin (2003), 2.
[3] Cf. Kannengeiser (1962), 360.
[4] Cf. Martin (2003), 2.
[5] Martin (2003), 5.
[6] Martin (2003), 6: 'Who were these *fratres mei*? Augustine frequently makes reference in his Letters to the *fratres qui mecum sunt in Domino*, the brethren who are members of his *monasterium clericorum* in Hippo Regius. He surely has them in mind, but perhaps not only them. It is also probable that the *fratres mei* refers to a wider circle of kindred bishops and fellow *serui Dei* who shared with Augustine a common love for Christ's church and its scriptures, an office of preaching and teaching, and a commitment to a life of holiness and ascetical dedication to spiritual growth and progress'.

presupposing an equal capability for his intended audience'.[7] This is particularly evident throughout the expositions in Augustine's concern for textual criticism and attention to grammar as in his frequent recourse to comparison with Greek codices. There is (perhaps regrettably) little of the 'light and shade' of many of the other expositions; there are very few glimpses of local colour and context, such as his congregation's love of the games, of elaborate funerals, of the celebrations of the martyrs.[8]

And yet, things are not quite so simple. For whilst the pressure for the exposition of Ps. 118 appears to have come from what was, by the standards of the church and monastery in Hippo, a theological élite and while the erudite nature of Augustine's commentary seems designed to appeal to them and feed them, he nonetheless makes it clear that he has decided to tackle the task in hand *not* by an academic treatise but, rather, by a series of public sermons,[9] so that members of the church congregation will not feel that they have been cheated by being denied comprehension of a psalm they love to sing.

Moreover, the distinction between Augustine's *fratres* (assuming that these include members of his community) and the wider group of Christians for whom the homilies are intended might be thought not only to be an intellectual one but also a spiritual distinction between, on the one hand, more 'advanced' ascetics and the general public. However, here again, Augustine resists this division. The teaching of these extended expositions of life under grace applies, as the preface tells us, equally to members of the monastery who earnestly seek spiritual nourishment and to members of church congregations who like singing psalms but have little idea what they are singing: one size fits all!

Augustine's refusal to distinguish between the two groups relates, perhaps, to a theme that was explored in the previous chapter: his stress on the monastic life as an integral part, albeit a particularly honoured part, of the Church.[10] For

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[7] Martin (2003), 4.
[8] An exception to this statement is the criticism of those who take up the bishop's time with vexatious litigation; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.24.3.
[9] *sermones...qui proferantur in populis.*
[10] Cf. Zumkeller (1986), 111-2.

Augustine, as Bonner notes, '[t]he monk is a lay Christian – a dedicated and devout Christian, it is true, but not separated by holy orders from the majority of his fellow Christians'.[11] Augustine points out in an earlier exposition, that the mixture that exists within the Church runs through the laity, the clergy and those living the monastic life. [12] As he puts it, looking on the negative side, 'be aware that there are dissemblers in every profession in the Church'.[13] Markus comments that Augustine's understanding of monastic life as the creation of a perfect community, rather than the perfection of individuals, is significant in shaping a non-élitist vision of the Church:

> It enabled him to re-define the monastic life in terms which avoided the risk of dividing the Church into a spiritual elite and second-class Christians. Perfection had no more – and, of course, no less – to do with the monastic life than with that of the ordinary faithful. Its pursuit was equally required from all, equally beyond the powers of all, and equally dependent on God's freely given grace.[14]

From the outset of this series of expositions, then, Augustine indicates that he is seeking to hold together both those who live under different types of discipline, and those who vary in intellectual attainment. Moreover, the profile of the congregation appears to relate integrally to the content of Augustine's expositions of this psalm. For, as will be explored below, the sermons teach that without grace, human endeavours to achieve discipline or to acquire knowledge are meaningless and hopeless, but that, in the light of grace, both discipline and knowledge are re-appropriated and transformed. This will take its cue from the seventeenth exposition, in which Augustine comments on Ps. 118:66, *Teach me about sweetness, and instruction, and knowledge, for I have believed in your commands*.[15] Grace works when God draws people to himself through sweetness (*suauitas*) operating on their wills.[16] Once they have been so drawn, they are

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[11] Bonner (2004), 70.
[12] Cf. *en. Ps.* 99.12-13; 132.9.
[13] *en. Ps.* 99.13: *scitote omnem professionem in ecclesia habere fictos.*
[14] Markus (1990), 159.
[15] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.17.2: *Suauitatem, et eruditionem/disciplinam, et scientiam doce me, quoniam mandatis tuis credidi.* On the second term, Augustine explains that different codices vary between *eruditio* and *disciplina*, and so, although having initially quoted the former, he comments on the latter.
[16] For discussion of the central issue in this chapter of the human will, and, in particular, the operation of grace upon it, cf. Burnaby (1938), 226-34; Clark (1994), 45-9; Dihle (1982), 128-31;

empowered in their efforts to live holy lives (this will be discussed under *disciplina*), and they are given progress in true knowledge (this is the subject of the final section on *scientia*).

1. *Suauitas*

a. Grace

Grace is at the centre of Augustine's teaching in this group of expositions.[17] Commenting on verse 33, *Impose your ways of justice as a law upon me, O Lord, and I will always seek it out*, Augustine comments that 'it is quite clear…that when the psalmist asks the Lord that a law be imposed on him, our attention is being drawn to the grace of God'.[18] What God commands from us, he must also give us: 'You are God, and I have believed you to be both the author of the commandments and the giver of grace whereby you cause men and women to do what you command'.[19] Indeed, everything that Augustine has to say in these extended meditations on God's laws, statutes, commandments, and testimonies, could almost be encapsulated in his famous words from the *Confessions* that became so crucial in the Pelagian controversy: 'Give what you command, and then command whatever you will'.[20]

Martin explores the many ways in which Augustine places grace at the centre of this group of expositions. One such way is the composition of 'concise yet dense maxims', 'darts of grace', that teach grace as a theological principle and inculcate a love of it.[21] Another is what Martin refers to as 'grace's grammar', an attention to seemingly insignificant words which express the central themes of grace. In this context, *utinam*, for example, expresses yearning,[22] and *ut* the utter

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Fredriksen (1988), 87-114; Harrison (2000a), 85-97; 110-4; (2006), chs. 6-8; S. Harrison (1999); O'Daly (2001), 86-93; Rist (1969), 420-447; Rist (1994), ch. 5; TeSelle (1970), 285-93; Wetzel (1992), 187-203. These works are drawn on throughout this chapter.

[17] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.4.2,3; 5.4; 10.5; 11.4; 13.1; 15.2; 16.6; 17.2,4; 19.7; 25.1,2,6; 26.1,7; 27.3,9; cf. Boulding (2000-4), 5: 543.

[18] *en. Ps.* 118.11.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.12.3.

[19] *en. Ps.* 118.17.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.12.5.

[20] *conf.* 10.29.40; cf. *conf.* 10.31.45; *perseu.* 20.53.

[21] Martin (2003), 9.

[22] Cf. Ps. 118:5: O that my ways may be directed towards observing your ways of justice (***Utinam*** *dirigantur viae meae ad custodiendas iustificationes tuas*). Augustine explains in *en.*

dependence of human beings on God's saving action.[23] Grace, in these expositions, as Martin insists, is 'not simply "grace" but always *gratia Christi*': 'victory comes by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord'.[24] Christ it is who justifies the godless;[25] 'through his becoming one with us, grace is dispensed to us'.[26] However, bearing in mind their pastoral orientation, the sermons also focus strongly not only on grace in its primary sense of salvation through Christ, but also in its secondary sense as daily help in living well. As Hombert comments in relation to earlier sermons, grace, for Augustine, is not only *remissio peccatorum*, but *adiutorum*, *opitulatio*, *sanatio*, *auxilium*, and *medicina*.[27]

How, then, does grace work upon the wills of fallen human beings? It does so, first and foremost, through sweetness.[28] 'God teaches us sweetness by breathing delight into us.'[29] In a passage from the *Confessions* that was quoted in the previous chapter, Augustine writes, 'my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me'.[30] Ultimately, human beings cannot be compelled to will.[31] The sweetness of God and of his commandments inspire love, which acts upon the wills of men and women, impelling them, by their own accord, towards God who is the source of this sweetness, the one to whom they can truly say *suauis es tu, Domine*.[32] Commenting on Ps 118:103, *How sweet in my mouth are your words, more delicious than the honeycomb to my taste*, Augustine explains,

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Ps. 118.4.2 that 'when you hear the phrase, *O that...!*, you must recognise the accents of someone who is yearning'.

[23] Cf. Ps. 118:80: 'Through your justifying actions let my heart be unsullied, that I may not be put to shame' (*Fiat cor meum immaculatum in iustificationibus tuis, **ut** non confundar*).

[24] *en. Ps.* 118.16.6.

[25] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.26.1.

[26] *en. Ps.* 118. 16.6; cf. 118.19.7.

[27] Cf. Hombert (1998), 219-20; 238-40.

[28] Cf. Harrison (2000a), 112. Harrison lists similar references in other anti-Pelagian works: *c.ep. Pel.* 1.13.27, 2.21; *s.* 131.2; *pecc. mer.* 2.17.26; *nat. et gr.* 31; *corrept.* 31.

[29] *en. Ps.* 118.17.3: *Docet ergo Deus suauitatem inspirando delectationem*. References to *suauitas* in earlier *enarrationes* include *en. Ps.* 57.4; 85.6; 134.12; 140.14; cf. Hombert (1998), 242. For an analysis of the way in which delight transforms the will, cf. Harrison (1993); (2000), 223-4; O'Daly (2001), 91-3.

[30] *conf.* 13.9.10, italics and psalm references in Boulding (1997), 348-9; cf. *conf.* 29.2.10; O'Donovan, (1980), 20-1.

[31] *c. Iul. imp.* 1.101; cf. *Simpl.* 1.2.21; Harrison (2000), 111-2; Burnaby (1938), 226-234.

[32] *en. Ps.* 118.17.6.

This is the sweetness the Lord gives so that our earth may yield its fruit, and we may do good in the right way, not out of fear of some material misfortune but from delight in spiritual good.[33]

So, for Augustine in *en. Ps.* 118, as elsewhere, it is through sweetness that 'grace makes us lovers of the Law, whereas the same Law, without grace, makes us only prevaricators'.[34]

'Your commandment is exceedingly wide', says the Psalmist.[35] Augustine's characteristic description of men and women under grace in these expositions is that, with wills drawn by sweetness to love of the good, their lives are lived out in a generous and wide arena: God has promised us a broad space;[36] 'the breadth of the commandment is revealed as love'.[37] Commenting on verse 32, *I have run the way of your commands, for you enlarged my heart*, Augustine characterises those who obey God's law out of love as having hearts made wider: they walk 'in the wide freedom of love, not in the constriction of fear'.[38] Commenting in another exposition on Ps. 133:1, *Come now bless the Lord...you who stand in the courts of the Lord*, he comments that 'courts are understood to be wide, spacious areas in the house (*atria ampliora spatia domus intelliguntur*)... Stand in charity; then you will stand in his courts.'[39] By contrast with those who stand in the wide space of charity, those who obey the law, or attempt to do so, for any other reason than love are, like Macbeth, 'cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in/ to saucy doubts and fears'.[40] The actions of those who obey the law out of fear are hemmed in, lacking the spacious freedom that characterises all truly good actions.

The commandment of charity is broad indeed, and it is a double commandment enjoining love of both God and neighbour. What could be wider than a command on which all the law and the prophets depend?[41]

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[33] *en. Ps.* 118.22.7; cf. 118.23.4.
[34] *gr. et lib. arb.* 18.38.
[35] Ps. 118:97: *Latum mandatum tuum valde.*
[36] *en. Ps.* 118.10.6: *nobis promittit latitudinem*; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.21.8, 22.1.
[37] *en. Ps.* 118.22.1.
[38] *en. Ps.* 118.11.1: *in latitudine amoris, non in timoris angustiis.*
[39] *en. Ps.* 133.1.
[40] *Macbeth*, Act 3, Sc. 4.
[41] *en. Ps.* 118.21.8.

When the law (whose primary content is love) is kept out of something other than love, an internal contradiction immediately appears. If, Augustine explains. people obey it out of fear of punishment, they are not delighted by it. and not united to it. 'A person controlled by this kind of fear would like to do what the law forbids and is peeved because it is forbidden.'[42] Such a person would in fact prefer the law not to exist, and so the will to sin lives on in them. By contrast, 'when charity is made perfect it casts out the fear of punishment, for charity sets us free, inspiring us to act not out of fear of punishment but out of delight in goodness'.[43] In the words of Burnaby, 'the paradox of the command to love is that if it be obeyed because it is commanded, it is not obeyed'.[44] As Augustine states elsewhere, the commandment to love would be a fruitless admonition 'if the will did not previously receive some donation of love' so as to enable it to obey.[45] Only those who are united by love to that law, whose content is itself love, will truly obey it.

b. The Holy Spirit

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about this union. This rests on the crucial verse, Romans 5:5: 'the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us'. [46] The ability, such as it is, of fallen human beings to keep God's commandments is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into their hearts: 'how are we to keep…[the law]?' asks Augustine, 'unless the life-giving Spirit grants us the power and comes to our help? Without him the letter of the law will be death-dealing.'[47] Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who has poured love into our hearts, men and women are enabled to love God's commandments, the content of which is love itself: 'this is the faith that works through charity; for by seeking, asking, and knocking it receives the good Spirit, through whom love itself is poured out in

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[42] *en. Ps.* 118.25.7.
[43] *en. Ps.* 118.25.7; cf. *en. Ps.* 32.2.6 (403?): 'You will fulfil through love what was beyond your powers through fear'; 118.26.8.
[44] Burnaby (1938), 234.
[45] *gr. et lib. arb.* 18.37.
[46] Quoted at *en. Ps.* 118.21.8, 26.8.
[47] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.16.2.

our hearts'.[48] Through the Holy Spirit, who is not only God himself, but God's own gift of himself,[49] God 'prepares the wills' of the faithful.[50] As Augustine writes in *De Trinitate*, 'the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured out in our hearts...and this gift surely is distinctively to be understood as being the charity which brings us through to God, without which no other gift of God at all can bring us through to God'.[51]

The action of the Holy Spirit, pouring love into the hearts of the faithful is, ultimately, what enables them to love what God commands, and to choose to do it freely: '…what is done in fear of punishment or for any carnal reason, and not with reference to that charity which the Holy Spirit pours out in our hearts, is not yet being done as it should be done, although it seems to be being done.'[52] Only the Holy Spirit truly enables us to act lovingly towards our neighbours: 'what else is the Psalmist asking...if not that by God's gift he may love God? By loving God he also loves himself, so that he may love his neighbour as himself, with the love that leads to salvation.'[53] The expositions thus place a gathering emphasis on the role of the Spirit as the one who enlarges our hearts, bringing us into the wide place where, united by love to the law that itself is love, we consistently act in love of God and neighbour.[54]

c. Paul

Throughout *en. Ps.* 118, St Paul is not only the chief exponent but also the chief exemplar of the graced life as it is portrayed in these expositions.[55] He is, in the terms of the psalm itself, the archetypal 'little one' to whom understanding has been imparted.[56] As Martin comments, '[t]he apostle will teach as well as model

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[48] *en. Ps.* 118.22.1; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.14.2.
[49] Cf. *trin.* 5.17; 15.33.
[50] *en. Ps.* 118.23.7, cf. *en. Ps.* 118.11.6; 23.7; *Io. eu. tr.* 9.8.
[51] *trin.* 15.32.
[52] *ench.* 32.121.
[53] *en. Ps.* 118.27.6.
[54] cf. *en. Ps.* 118.14.2,4; 16.2; 17.2; 22.1; 24.4; 26.8; *cat. rud.* 22.39.
[55] Martin calculates that the expositions of Psalm 118 contain no less than 230 citations from St Paul. For a discussion of Paul's influence on Augustine, cf. Harrison (2006), ch.5.
[56] *en. Ps.* 118.27.3.

what it means to walk in the way of the Lord'.[57] Paul thus demonstrates in his own life the way in which God pours love into the hearts of the faithful, empowering them to follow the law of love, by uniting them with it, enabling their lives to be lived in the latitude of love and not in the cramped conditions of fear:

> Now what does it mean to say, 'And I walked continually in wide freedom'? Nothing else than 'I walked continually in charity', the charity poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. One man who was walking in this wide freedom was he who said, 'Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians, and our heart is thrown wide open' (2 Cor 6:11). But this charity is summed up, whole and entire, in the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbour, on which all the law and the prophets depend.[58]

d. The Psalm

Sweetness, grace, charity, the work of the Holy Spirit, thus take a pre-eminent place in this group of expositions, but is this simply a piece of 'eisegesis' on Augustine's part? How obviously is Ps. 118 a psalm about grace? Here it is helpful to return to the preface to these expositions, where it is apparent that, for Augustine, the psalm defies easy characterisations such as 'simple' or 'complex'. For its apparent simplicity in fact hides a deeper complexity. On a surface level, it appears not even to require an expositor but only a reader and a listener. But this is misleading: the psalm is in fact so obscure that even its own obscurities are themselves obscured from view. The particular potential for misunderstanding presented by Psalm 118 is somewhat different in nature to that encountered in the other psalms. Other psalms present pitfalls to the interpreter by, for example, their anthropomorphism, the bleak prospect that they hold out of a shadowy afterlife in Sheol, their confidence in the everlasting permanence of the earth. So far as Augustine is concerned, such problems demand from the Christian interpreter a figurative explanation.[59]

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[57] Martin (2003), 11.
[58] *en. Ps.* 118.14.2; cf. *cat. rud.* 23.41.
[59] This point draws on Fiedrowicz (2000), 27.

By contrast, Psalm 118 contains few of these problems.[60] The obscurity of *this* psalm lies not so much in language that needs to be penetrated in order to find its true meaning but more in the subtle thoughts it generates about how God's law is to be kept. For Ps. 118 might seem to contain what for Augustine in the early 420s would be a more intractable set of difficulties: a potentially misleading set of theological ideas. This 'Torah Psalm'[61] could be seen in the terms in which Peter Brown describes it, as 'a thoroughly "Pelagian" psalm, containing…a static code of precepts for the life of a good man…'[62] Verse after verse concerns the commandments of God and the need for human beings to keep them and follow them. It is, of course, no coincidence that Psalm 118 (119) has often been extensively used in the Church's midday office, since it encourages the disciplined daily keeping of God's word, perseverance, endurance – all of which might well be interpreted as very Pelagian virtues.

However, Brown's comment is perhaps over-stated: the psalm is less 'Pelagian' than he seems to suggest. Even John Day, in whose view the *Enarrationes* as a whole are 'worthless as exegesis of the biblical text',[63] might be able to admit that Augustine's exegesis is not wholly off the mark. For, as Day comments, the psalm repeats 'in many different ways...the psalmist's devotion to the Torah'.[64] For sure, it emphasises the importance of keeping God's precepts, commandments and ordinances, yet it also consistently emphasises the fact that this law is a source of joy and delight: *Quomodo dilexi legem tuam, Domine! Tota die meditatio mea est.*[65] God's testimonies, commandments and ordinances are not only a set of rules that human beings are commanded to obey but also, they contain the sweetness that can inspire, motivate and draw human beings towards themselves and, ultimately, towards the God who has given them. The tension created by the psalm's insistence that, on the one hand, God's law must be obeyed and that, on the other, it must be loved, give it its true complexity and difficulty.

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[60] But cf. *en. Ps.* 118.15.1.
[61] Cf. Day (1992), 56. Torah Psalms are a sub-category of Wisdom Psalms, among which Ps. 119 (=118) has a pre-eminent place.
[62] Brown (1967), 373.
[63] Day (1992), 139.
[64] Day (1992), 56.
[65] Ps. 118:97; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.22.1.

2. *Disciplina*

a. Synergy (i)

Dihle argues that, prior to the time of Augustine, a comprehensive and coherent theory of the grace of God was not needed in the way that it subsequently came to be. Thus, theologians and preachers could use words such as *charis* and *gratia* to express the fact that God had not only given the Law to save his people, but also to describe gifts such as baptism or individual conversion and renewal. *Charis* can designate God's forgiveness of the sinner as well as the special gifts of prophets, bishops, or teachers. Dihle writes that,

> The fundamental belief behind these varying statements about God's grace can be described as unreflected synergism. In the practical life of Christian congregations before Constantine, that is to say in an alien or even hostile environment, both the consciousness of being elected, guided, and saved solely by the inexplicable grace of God, and that of being responsible for an appropriate Christian conduct of life must have been present without much awareness of the theoretical contradiction implied.[66]

The official recognition of Christianity, Dihle argues, raised sharp questions about human motivation which made synergistic approaches, at least in the short term, more difficult to sustain. However, an argument for maintaining a synergistic approach to these issues is adopted by John Cassian, the abbot of St Victor. Cassian's thirteenth Conference *On Divine Protection* was composed in the 420s for his communities in Marseilles.[67] The work, although probably more anti-Pelagian than anti-Augustinian,[68] reflects the rejection by monks in southern Gaul of what was perceived to be the extreme predestinarianism of the writings of Augustine and others on his side of the Pelagian controversy. As Bonner writes, 'they refused to accept a doctrine which seemed to them to reduce the individual human soul to the condition of a mere puppet in the divine plan'.[69] Cassian's thirteenth *Conference*, although not in direct dialogue with *en. Ps.* 118, nevertheless was composed at a very similar period, and provides comparisons

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[66] Dihle (1982), 129.
[67] For studies of Cassian, cf. Chadwick (1950); Macqueen (1977); Ramsey (1993); Stewart (1998).
[68] Cf. *Coll.* 13.16.1.
[69] Bonner (1986), 350.

which illuminate Augustine's approach to the life of grace, as he expresses it in his expositions of Psalm 118.

The overall intention of Cassian's work is to combat the dangers of monastic *tepor*, or spiritual lassitude, a faltering and flagging of the will.[70] Monks in the monastery need encouragement, as, by grace and their own efforts, the glimmerings of a good will inside them are gradually transformed into a holy life.[71] Thus, Cassian proposes a complex pattern in which divine and human actions are able to work in tandem with one another, sometimes together and sometimes building on one another. When God notices a modicum of good will making an appearance in a monk's life, 'at once he enlightens and encourages it, and spurs it on to salvation, giving increase to what he himself planted and saw arise from our own efforts'.[72]

The context of the *Conference* is a disagreement between the monks Germanus and Chaeremon about the necessity of grace. Germanus takes exception to Chaeremon's Augustine-like contention that 'a human being, although striving with all his strength for a good result, would nonetheless be unable to possess the good unless he had received it through the generosity of a divine bestowal rather than by his own zealous toil'.[73] To attribute such an overwhelming role to God's grace contradicts an intuitive sense that the labourer's reward should be ascribed to the intensity of his own efforts, and 'tends towards the destruction of free will'.[74] It also makes no sense of the fact that gentiles who have never received divine grace have nonetheless shone with virtue.[75]

Given the *Conference*'s conversational form, it is sometimes difficult to establish which parts of the exchanges between Germanus and Chaeremon represent Cassian's own views. However, what comes clearly through from the work is Cassian's belief in a complex synergy between God's grace and human effort in attempts to live a holy life: 'God', he writes, 'provides for the salvation of the

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[70] Cf. Chadwick (1950), 134; Macqueen (1977).
[71] Cf. *Coll.* 13.7.1.
[72] *Coll.* 13.8.4.
[73] *Coll.* 13.1.
[74] *Coll.* 13. 2.
[75] *Coll.* 13.4.

human race in numberless different manners and in inscrutable ways';[76] '...how God works all things in us on the one hand and how everything is ascribed to free will on the other cannot be fully grasped by human intelligence and reason.'[77] Reflecting the eastern Christian and monastic traditions which formed him,[78] Cassian resists what he sees as the attempts of theologians such as Pelagius and Augustine to import sharp dichotomies into the picture of God's grace and human effort. For, to Cassian, this is a picture which ought rightly to remain imprecise and happily synergistic:

> These things are mixed together and fused so indistinguishably that which is dependent on which (i.e., God's mercy or human will) is a great question as far as many people are concerned – that is, whether God has mercy on us because we manifest the beginnings of a good will, or we acquire the beginnings of a good will because God is merciful. For many who hold to one of these alternatives and assert it more freely than is right have fallen into different self-contradictory errors.[79]

To prove his case, Cassian notes that the scriptures themselves bear witness to the complexity of the relationship between divine and human action. For example, it is said *both* that God 'renders to each one according to his works' (Rom. 2:6) *and* also that 'it is God who works in you both to will and to accomplish, for the sake of his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13).[80] Here and in other similarly contrasting texts, 'both the grace of God and our freedom of will are affirmed, since even by his own activity a person can occasionally be brought to a desire for virtue, but he always needs to be helped by the Lord'.[81] An examination of various characters in the New Testament bears out, for Cassian, the contention that the origin of good actions is a complex question. For, it is certainly the case that the biographies of some reveal that God's grace inspires their will, hence the sudden conversions of Paul and Matthew. And yet, the

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[76] *Coll.* 13.17.1: *diuersis atque innumeris modis et inscrutabilibus uiis, Deum salutem humani generis procurare.*
[77] *Coll.* 13.18.4.
[78] Cf. Stewart (1998), 77-8.
[79] *Coll.* 13.11.1: *Et ita sunt haec quodammodo indiscrete permixta atque confusa, ut quid ex quo pendeat inter multos magna quaestione uoluatur, id est, utrum quia initium bonae uoluntatis praebuerimus, misereatur nostri Deus; an quia Deus miseretur, consequamur bonae uoluntatis initium? Multi enim singula haec quaerentes ac iusto amplius asserentes, uariis sibique contrariis sunt erroribus inuoluti.*
[80] *Coll.* 13.9.2.
[81] *Coll.* 13.9.3.

history of characters such as Zacchaeus and the thief on the cross testify to the way in which others themselves initiate their return towards God: 'by their own desire they brought a certain force to bear on the heavenly kingdom and anticipated the particular signs of their calling'.[82]

Cassian thus argues for what Stewart describes as the "suppleness" of the ways in which God works in human lives,[83] for the existence of an essentially indefinable reciprocal relationship between divine and human action by which 'the grace of God always works together with our will on behalf of the good, helping it in everything and protecting and defending it'.[84] This, however, should not be taken to imply that God's action and human action are equal or commensurate. God is capable of crowning our efforts with his own actions. David's brief confession, 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sam. 12:13a), evokes an incomparably immense divine reward.[85] Likewise, Cassian says, 'the grace of God remains free, since with inestimable generosity it confers on meagre and small efforts such immortal glory and such gifts of everlasting blessedness'.[86] Indeed, the capacity of human beings for acting virtuously can itself be attributed to grace: that which was originally given by the Creator, who has placed seeds of virtue in every soul.[87] Likewise, the very existence of a monastery presupposes the constant operation of God's grace in the lives of its members, thus Chadwick remarks that in the *Conference*, 'it is certain that grace is not discarded but throughout assumed...presupposed, not omitted'.[88] Such reliance on grace is, as Chadwick argues, made particularly evident by the *Conference*'s constant emphasis on the importance of prayer for God's aid.

Scholars have put considerable effort into arguing that the differences between Augustine and Cassian are, to an extent, superficial.[89] Among others, two reasons, in particular, are advanced for this conclusion.

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[82] *Coll.* 13.11.2: *qui desiderio suo uim quamdam regnis coelestibus inferentes, specialia uocationis monita praeuenerunt.*
[83] Stewart (1998), 60.
[84] *Coll.* 13.13.1.
[85] *Coll.* 13.13.3.
[86] *Coll.* 13.13.1.
[87] *Coll.* 13.12.7; cf. Stewart (1998), 80.
[88] Chadwick (1950), 124-5.
[89] Cf. Chadwick (1950); Macqueen (1977); Ramsey (1993).

The first is the argument that the apparent divergences between Augustine and Cassian are largely context-related. Thus, it is argued that what may appear to be disagreements can largely be attributed to the fact that the thirteenth *Conference* comes out of, and reflects upon, a specifically monastic setting. According to this view, the monastic nature of the work gives it a natural tendency to encourage those living the ascetic life towards greater efforts, and to stress the importance of those efforts in the life of faith. In such a context, as Macqueen writes, '[u]ltimately everything will depend upon the monk's reserves of spiritual energy and resilience'.[90] By contrast, it is implied that Augustine, operating in the *pastoral* context of a mixed and recalcitrant congregation, naturally lays less stress on the importance of human beings taking responsibility for avoiding minor sins, and more upon the need for God to act radically in turning around the lives of individuals.

A further argument is that the apparent disagreements between the two authors are, to some extent, a matter of style rather than substance. Macqueen attributes the unclarity of Cassian's views about whether good actions come from God or from human beings to 'the highly discursive and unsystematic nature of his thought, which ranges at will, and often without previous warning, from the realm of abandoned sinners and enemies of God to an inner circle of devout penitents, *renuntiantes*, monks in active pursuit of perfection'.[91] Hence, the disagreements between Augustine and Cassian are 'a clash of temperaments rather than of doctrines',[92] and their disagreements 'a tragedy of mutual misunderstanding'.[93]

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[90] Macqueen (1977), 17.
[91] Macqueen (1977), 11; cf. Chadwick (1950), 109.
[92] Macqueen (1977), 19. Macqueen charts a broad range of areas of agreement between the two writers, arguing that, from the beginning, Cassian's work has been misinterpreted by Augustine and others because it was (largely thanks to Prosper) read outside its monastic context, in which complete reliance on God's grace would have been assumed. Similarly, Augustine's work was misunderstood by Cassian and the Massilians generally because they concentrated too intensely on his polemical works, 'to the virtual exclusion or neglect of his sermons, letters, and Biblical commentaries', including, of course, the *Enarrationes* in which 'the Doctor of Grace is at pains to assert that grace is given to all adult Christians as a sufficient aid to virtue in their day-to-day actions' (Macqueen [1977], 24-25).
[93] Macqueen (1977), 22.

However, if the summary above of Cassian's argument in the thirteenth *Conference* is accurate, then it would appear that the scholars who argue for the basic similarity of Augustine's and Cassian's views have downplayed some very important differences.

In the first place, the attempt to attribute Cassian and Augustine's differences on this subject to their respective 'monastic' and 'pastoral' contexts is surely open to serious question. To make an obvious point, Augustine was a monk as well as a bishop, and, indeed, the author of a monastic rule, as well as other monastic works. More specifically, as was seen in the preface to *en. Ps.* 118, this particular series of sermons appears to be carefully designed for an audience that comprises both 'ordinary' Christians and those who are advanced in the ascetic life. The same message, it was argued, is thought appropriate for both groups. It was emphasised in the discussion of *en. Ps.* 132 in the previous chapter, that Augustine characteristically refuses to erect large divisions between those living within the monastery and those outside. Hence his stress on the importance of Acts 4 as a general rule for Christian life, and not just for ascetics, and his description of the way in which the one and the same oil, representing the Holy Spirit, is poured over Aaron's head (Christ) from where it flows on to his beard (the martyrs) to his collar (the monasteries) and ultimately to his tunic (the whole Church).

For Augustine, Markus argues, '[s]in placed all human institutions and groups irrevocably beyond the reach of any model of heavenly perfection'.[94] It is difficult to accept, then, the suggestion that Augustine might broadly agree with Cassian's assessment of how grace works when it comes to life within the monastery, but disagree with it, or want to state things differently, when it comes to life on the outside. It may, then, be the case, as Stewart argues, that '[i]n terms of the *practice* of the Christian life, Augustine and Cassian may scarcely have differed'.[95] And yet, the fundamental differences between the accounts that the two writers give of the relationship between divine and human action cannot

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[94] Markus (1990), 176.
[95] Stewart (1998), 19.

simply be attributed to their differing contexts. To do this would fundamentally undercut Augustine's thinking about the nature of monastic life.

Moreover, it seems right to question the argument that the differences between Cassian and Augustine are really to do with style rather than substance; that the two theologians are really expressing similar views, Cassian in unsystematic ways, and Augustine in ways that are more clearly defined. For it is central to Cassian's argument that in understanding the synergy between God's grace and human action, we *should* be unclear, and resist undue systematisation and false dichotomies. Similarly, it is central to Augustine's thought on the subject that it is vital to be *completely* clear about the over-riding importance of grace, and not try to blur and fudge the boundaries. Thus, it is of the essence of Augustine's approach that it is systematic. Indeed, as has been argued above, his account of the operation of grace is inextricably entwined with his understanding of the way in which the Holy Spirit operates, in other words, with his systematic theology. As Chadwick points out, the inscrutability of God's actions refers, for Augustine, not to the complexity of the ways in which God cooperates with human beings (Cassian's interpretation), but to man's inability to question God's judgements.[96] The relatively unclear and unsystematic nature of Cassian's thought and the clear and systematic nature of Augustine's are thus central, and not peripheral, to what makes them so very different.[97]

For, to return to *en. Ps.* 118, Augustine wants to be very clear indeed: there is no questioning the fact that human beings are unable to initiate their own salvation. Rather, as he states early in the series of expositions, all are sinful, even the saints, even, presumably monks: 'if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us'.[98] He witheringly condemns those who feign humility, claiming themselves to be without sin:

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[96] Cf. Chadwick (1950).
[97] Cf. Dihle (1982), 129-130, for a discussion of the reaction of both Augustine and Pelagius against the 'unreflected synergism' of the period before the official recognition of Christianity.
[98] 1 Jn. 1:8; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.1.3; 2.1.

> Let Christ's holy family raise a different cry, Christ's holy fellowship that is bearing fruit and growing throughout the world, humble in its truthfulness, and truthful in its humility (*humiliter verax et veraciter humilis*).[99]

Thus, there is no possibility, in whatever context, of drawing distinctions of the sort that Cassian makes between those who initiate their own salvation and those whom God turns round in their ways. Absolutely no one is able to 'bring force to bear on the heavenly Kingdom'. And, again, there cannot be any essential difference in this respect between those who live the ascetic life and those who do not. Rather, as Rist puts it, 'Augustine's position is...that all of us are acratic all the time':[100] 'the grace of our Saviour found all guilty of breaking the law'.[101]

Augustine's *acratic* does not, to use Macqueen's phrase quoted above, 'draw upon his own reserves of spiritual energy and resilience'. Rather, he 'is the man who always and continually needs to be inspired by God, to be enflamed ever more by love'.[102] Thus, throughout the series of expositions, Augustine is at pains to exclude any notion that human beings are the initiators of their own ability to obey God's laws. The Psalmist prays, 'do not thrust me away from your commandments'.[103] What can this mean, asks Augustine, other than that 'human weakness cannot adapt itself to God's straight and arduous commandments unless his charity takes the initiative and helps us'?[104] 'The apostle', he tells his congregation, 'wants us to be recognized as children of the promise by our determination to ascribe nothing of what we are to ourselves and everything to the grace of God';[105] our own efforts are futile without God's grace: 'what we do is God's doing'.[106] It is only through grace and God's justifying work, and not through any efforts of our own, that cleanness of heart may be achieved, so this must be 'prayed for, not presumed'.[107] Throughout this

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[99] *en. Ps.* 118.2.1.
[100] Rist (1994), 184.
[101] *en. Ps.* 118. 25.5.
[102] Rist (1994).
[103] Ps. 118:10.
[104] *en. Ps.* 118.5.3: *Mandatis quippe eius rectis atque arduis humana non contemperatur infirmitas, nisi praeveniens eius adiuvet charitas.*
[105] *en. Ps.* 118.13.1: *Unde nos vult apostolus filios promissionis intelligi; ne arbitremur nostrum esse quod sumus, sed totum Dei gratiae retribuamus.*
[106] *en. Ps.* 118.16.2: *ab illo fit ut faciamus.* Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.4.2, 21.6, 22.2.
[107] *en. Ps.* 118.19.7.

group of expositions, Augustine systematically drives home to his congregation their complete reliance on God's grace, and their total inability without it. It is the very clarity of this message that contrasts so sharply with Cassian's insistence on the necessary *un*clarity of the synergy between divine and human action.

b. Improvement

And yet, for all the emphasis upon human sinfulness and the necessity for grace, it is clear from this set of expositions that the graced life into which God calls men and women is not static, but rather one in which they are able to grow and progress. Indeed, the idea of progress in the graced life in the *Enarrationes* is not confined to the expositions of Ps. 118, but evident from other places as well. Some of these have been explored in previous chapters, and it may be worthwhile briefly to recall them.

An initial example was encountered in chapter one: the Psalmist himself, identified with the figure of Idithun, the leaper. Idithun's leaping places him in a particular position in relation to that which is above him (God) and to those who are below him (other people). In relation to God, he must always remember his subservient position. God must always be Idithun's refuge and impregnable tower against the enemy,[108] and any progress that he makes towards God is because of God's grace. Idithun's ability to leap has made him able to motivate others to make the same progress that he has made:

> He does not look down in such a way as to risk falling; but having leapt himself he tries to move lazier folk to follow him, and he means to extol the place he has attained by his leaping.[109]

Indeed, whether he does pass on to others what he has learned is a litmus test of the reality of his own progress. Were he not to share what he has learned with others, then his leaping could be put down to pride. As it is, however, it is real leaping, real advancement:

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[108] Ps. 60:4; cf *en. Ps.* 61.3.
[109] *en. Ps.* 61.1.

His leap has landed him into a position where he is above something (those who accuse and mock him), but also below something else (God); and he is intent on telling us what this thing above him is, the thing that makes him feel safe, so that his leaping over things may be deemed not pride but progress (*non...superbiae sed provectus*).[110]

A second example of progress was also encountered in chapter one, in the discussion of Augustine's description of his own congregation, as slowly they grow and progress[111] in their knowledge of the scriptures. Such knowledge entirely depends, it was argued, upon their membership of the body of Christ, which gives them the prior understanding necessary to understand the scriptural text. And yet, despite this, it is clear, not least from people's shouts of recognition at familiar allusions, that to preach is not to be constantly catechising the uninstructed, but that Augustine observes real progress and growth occurring in those to whom he preaches.

Again, in chapter three, the journey of ascent to Jerusalem implies progress by its very nature, and the expositions of the Psalms of Ascent are replete with references to it. Human beings, in Augustine's account of them in these expositions, are never static, but always moving in one way or another: 'everyone who is making progress is climbing up to this city; anyone who stops trying falls away'.[112] As was argued, such progress is wholly dependent upon grace. The heavenly city is not just a destination towards which the pilgrims are heading, but rather the love that the city inspires actually draws the pilgrims forward. And yet progress towards the heavenly city is nonetheless real. The journey of ascent is compared with Jacob's vision of ladders (Gen 28:12), on which 'some make progress and others fall away'.[113] Similarly, the Psalmist as he embarks on the journey of ascent is 'already mounting the first step and beginning to make headway',[114] although he needs always to be aware, of course, that if he takes pride in his progress, this itself will bring him tumbling down again.[115]

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[110] *en. Ps.* 61.1.
[111] Cf. *en. Ps.* 131.1: *crescendum et proficiendum.*
[112] *en. Ps.* 126.1: *ascendit ad hanc omnis qui proficit; cadit ab hac omnis qui deficit.*
[113] *en. Ps.* 119.2: *alii proficiunt; alii deficiunt.*
[114] *en. Ps.* 119.6: *iam ascendit gradum, incipit proficere...*
[115] *en. Ps.* 122.3.

Augustine's expositions of Ps. 118 are in line with such descriptions of growth and progress. In his tenth sermon in this group of expositions, he offers a description of the moral life in which, aided by grace, progress and improvement are possible, albeit that such progress is invariably faltering and slow, even for human beings 'under grace'. Commenting on Ps. 118:25, *My soul is stuck to the hard floor*,[116] Augustine leaves his listeners in no doubt about the need to recognise that any progress that human beings might make depends upon God's grace being daily renewed, and yet progress is possible:

> ...however far a person has advanced in the Lord's ways of justice, he is still conscious of the desire of mortal flesh for those earthly things amid which human life on earth is one long temptation. But if he perseveres and continues to make progress, he is brought to life every day from that deathly condition, for he is constantly given life by God, whose grace renews our inner self day by day.[117]

By contrast with Cassian's understanding that the small triumphs that human beings might have will be crowned with God's immeasurably greater rewards, for Augustine, the contribution that human beings make to their own progress is more to do with their failures than their successes. Commenting on verse 81, *My soul has fallen away with longing for your salvation, and for your word I have hoped*, Augustine expresses the view that moral improvement is built not by the successive efforts of God and human beings, gathering strength as time goes on, but, rather, by the very experience of failure. For normally making progress and falling away (*proficere et deficere*) are regarded as opposites, and yet there is 'an exhaustion that is praiseworthy and to be desired',[118] 'a salutary kind of falling away [which] signals a desire for some good not as yet won but longed for with fierce intensity'.[119] This is the desire of Simeon to see the Lord before he died, one that was 'shared by all the holy people of ancient times', in their longing to see the Lord.[120] Martin writes that Augustine proposes a model for Christian

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[116] *Adhaesit pavimento anima mea.*
[117] *en. Ps.* 118.10.2; cf. 118.23.4.
[118] *en. Ps.* 118.20.1: *est etiam defectus laudabilis vel optabilis.*
[119] *en. Ps.* 118.20.1: *Bonum est ergo iste defectus: indicat enim desiderium boni, nondum quidem adepti, sed avidissime ac vehementissime concupiti.*
[120] Cf. Lk. 10:24.

holiness marked 'not by accomplishment and victory but by tension and struggle': he 'insist(s) on improvement and yet hold(s) firm to a notion of imperfection'.[121] Far from being an accelerating progression of increasingly successful performances, progress and improvement for fallen human beings come primarily through their own failure, their exhaustion, their inability. Such experiences kindle the desire for God, and are the raw material with which God can work as, by grace, he draws his people out of the *valle plorationis*, and leads them towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

Yet, the need of fallen human beings for grace and the uncertainty of their improvement should not obscure the fact that progress in the moral and spiritual life can and does happen:

> This is the prayer of one who is making progress. If he had not advanced at all in the Lord's ways of justice, he obviously could not have said, as he did in an earlier verse, *Your servant was busily employed in your ways of justice*. He is therefore not hoping to learn from the Lord those ways of justice in which he is already well versed; he wants to move on to others, thus making progress and new growth.[122]

Similar points are made in the following exposition. Augustine reiterates the central point that the children of God not only retain the law in their memory, but they 'observe [it] by loving choice in the wide freedom of love, not in the constriction of fear'.[123] Walking in charity, because God has enlarged their hearts,[124] they are able to grow and progress:

> ...the speaker is a person gaining ground. He knows that this progress is a gift from God, and when he asks for a law to be laid upon him, his request means that he sees it as a way of advancing more and more.[125]

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[121] Martin (2003), 21.
[122] *en. Ps.* 118.10.3: *Proficientis haec oratio est....Non ergo in quibus exercebatur, has vult a Domino discere; sed ab istis ad alias proficiendo, velut crescendo, desiderat pervenire*; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.23.4.
[123] *en. Ps.* 118.11.1: *Non quam memoria teneant, et vita negligant; sed quam sciant intelligendo, faciant diligendo, in latitudine amoris, non in timoris angustiis.*
[124] *Dilatasti cor meum*; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.10.6.
[125] *en. Ps.* 118.11.2: *proficiens loquitur, et Dei donum novit esse quod proficit; quid aliud petit, cum sibi legem poni petit, nisi ut in ea magis magisque proficiat.*

Thus, progress through God's grace is possible. The Psalmist can plead that God's grace 'may become more and more familiar to him through the sweetness of what is good';[126] his request for improvement, like that of the disciples asking *Lord, increase our faith* (Lk. 17:5), is 'the song of those who are on their way'.[127] For all that any gaining of ground is and continues always to be God's gift, yet people can and do make progress. The Psalmist 'realises that he is capable of things he formerly knew to be impossible for him, things he certainly could not have done by himself'.[128] Indeed, the capacity of human beings for growth, change and progression is a central feature of what it means to be human and to live in the world:

> One who is always advancing and improving in this world arrives at the goal to which his or her efforts are tending; after that there is no more progress, because the person stands perfect and stable without end.[129]

In his seventh exposition on Psalm 118, Augustine comments on verse seventeen, *Pay back your servant; then I shall live and guard your words*. He reflects on the different modes of recompense[130] that can be perceived in the ways both of God and of human beings. Four different modes of retribution are described:

> First, evil may be the retribution for evil, as when God will punish the wicked with everlasting fire; second, good things may be the recompense for good, as when he will reward the just with an eternal kingdom; third, evil may be repaid by good, as when Christ justifies the godless through grace; fourth, good may be repaid by evil, as when Judas and the Jews persecuted Christ out of malice.[131]

Of these four types, he says, the first two are manifestations of justice; the third a manifestation of mercy; the fourth is unknown to God. Particularly highlighted

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[126] *en. Ps.* 118.17.2.
[127] *en. Ps.* 118.17.2: *proficientium est ista cantatio.*
[128] *en. Ps.* 118.17.2; cf. 118.26.6.
[129] *en. Ps.* 118.11.3: *Qui vero in melius semper hic proficit, quo proficiendo nititur, pervenit, ubi iam non proficiat, quia perfectus sine fine consistit.*
[130] Cf. Boulding (2000-4), 5: 368.
[131] *en. Ps.* 118.7.1; cf. 108.4.

is the third category. This, he says, 'necessarily has priority, because if God did not repay evil with good, there would never be any good people to whom he could render good for good'.[132] When God gives this type of retribution, he is dispensing grace and so this is the decisive moment. And yet, once grace is given, the second type of retribution becomes possible: good can now be repaid with good. Thus, the fact that good people are good is wholly a work of God's grace, yet it is also true that, because God has made them good, they really are good and they can rightly be rewarded for being so.

As so often in this series of expositions, Paul provides a case study in his transition from persecutor of the Church to apostle to the gentiles: *uide illum Saulum, postea Paulum.*[133] The third type of retribution in Augustine's list is central to Saul's conversion: 'God repaid Paul's evil with good, giving him life in place of death'. But, in Paul's later career, the words of the Psalmist, *Pay back your servant; then I shall live and guard your words*, did indeed come true: 'Paul did live. He guarded the Lord's words, and began to qualify for the other kind of recompense, whereby good is rendered for good.'[134] Augustine reminds his listeners that even the repayment of good for good that takes place in Paul's later career is a work of God's grace, because it would not have happened had not God initially been merciful. Type three recompense is always the foundation for type two, and it remains the case that the outcome of Paul's career depends 'not on the one who wills it, nor on the one who runs, but on God who shows mercy'.[135] And yet, Paul *has* been able to say truthfully 'I have fought the good fight, I have run the whole course, I have kept the faith'. Paul's deeds are wholly due to God's mercy, so that, as Hombert puts it, commenting on Augustine's preaching at an earlier stage, there is a 'semi-absorption' of merit by grace, since grace is the foundation of merit: 'the crown which is given is due to your merits, but your merits are the gift of God'.[136] And yet the fact remains that, near the end of his life, Paul is able to identify what he has done as his own deeds, even

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[132] en. Ps. 118.7.1: *nisi enim Deus retribueret bona pro malis, nullo modo essent quibus retribueret bona pro bonis.*
[133] *en. Ps.* 118.7.2.
[134] *en. Ps.* 118.7.2.
[135] Rom. 9:16, quoted in *en. Ps.* 118.7.2.
[136] *gest. Pel.* 14.35; cf. Hombert (1998), 235.

while being simultaneously aware that God in rewarding these is only rewarding his own gifts.[137]

The conclusion, near the end of this exposition, is a nuanced statement about progress and reward:

> There is no place whatever for human pride to rear its head, for when God rewards us with good things he is rewarding his own gifts. But the one who is now praying, *Pay back your servant; then I shall live*, must have begun to live, because if he were entirely dead he would not be praying. He has received from God the glimmerings of good desire and now begs for the true life of obedience. Similarly, the disciples who asked, *Lord, increase our faith* (Lk. 17:5), had some faith already. Another man, on being asked whether he believed, replied *I do believe, Lord; help my unbelief* (Mk. 9:23); he was confessing his faithlessness yet not disavowing his faith. The speaker in the psalm is certainly beginning to live when he begs for life, and he already believes as he prays for obedience. He is not asking for a life already safe to be rewarded, but for help, that his life may be saved. One who is being renewed from day to day lives every day more fully as he grows.[138]

All good deeds, all growth, all improvement are the result of grace. Pride of any sort must be immediately disqualified. Yet, precisely because grace is effective, it calls people back to life. It plants in them good desires which they can truly own as being theirs. Human beings under grace can affirm the progress they have made, and claim it as truly their own, so long as they always remember that God was the source of that progress, and that there is much more of it that, through grace, they still need to make.

c. Synergy (ii)

The discussion of progress and improvement in the graced life leads to the conclusion that, while Augustine's theology sharply differs from that of Cassian, it is nonetheless possible to perceive in the expositions of Psalm 118 a very different type of synergy. This is not a matter of human efforts and God's grace re-enforcing one another (Cassian-style), but, rather, it happens when, inspired by the grace of God, a human being's will is changed, so that he or she begins to

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[137] On God rewarding his own gifts, cf. *en. Ps.* 70.2.5, 98.8, 102.7; *ep.* 194.19; *gr. et lib. arb.* 9.21; Boulding (2000-4), 5: 86, n. 24; Hombert (1998), 234-5.
[138] *en. Ps.* 118.7.3.

delight in God's commandments and, delighting in them, starts to do them freely and willingly. This can rightly be called synergy because God's grace does not *dis*empower human agents, obliterating their wills, but empowers them, enabling them freely to love God and neighbour, and to do good works that express such love.

Thus, in the expositions, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist's will has been prepared by God, and yet it really is the Psalmist's will, acting freely. Finding enjoyment in the sweetness of the Lord, he begins to do out of his own volition what the law requires.[139] Commenting on verse 112, *I have bent my heart toward the observance of your ways*, Augustine says that 'the psalmist, who here declared, *I have bent my heart*, prayed earlier, *Bend my heart to your testimonies*, to show us that this was the work both of divine grace and of his own will'.[140] And on the similar verse, Ps. 118:36, *Bend my heart to your testimonies, and not to covetousness*, he comments that while the Psalmist who is 'still gaining ground, still running (*adhuc proficit, adhuc currit*)'[141] knows that his capacity to make progress in keeping God's commandments depends 'not on the one who wills, not on the one who runs, but on God who exercises mercy', yet he has truly found himself with his heart bent towards the commandments:

> What does it mean to have one's heart bent toward something? Surely, to will that thing. This means that the psalmist has willed it, yet at the same time he prays to will it. He has willed it, for he says, *Lead me in the path of your commandments, because that is what I have willed*; but he also prays to will it, by saying, *Bend my heart to your testimonies, and not to covetousness*. He makes this prayer that he may advance in his willed decision.[142]

As Burnaby writes,

> God's spiritual gifts are never external objects, separable possessions of the recipient. God's gifts 'become our own when we love what we have received': that is, they enter into the texture

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[139] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.17.1.
[140] *en. Ps.* 118.23.8: *ut intelligamus simul hoc esse et divini muneris et propriae voluntatis.*
[141] *en. Ps.* 118.11.6.
[142] *en. Ps.* 118.11.6: *Quid est inclinatum cor ad aliquid habere, nisi hoc velle? Et voluit ergo, et orat ut velit. Voluit, cum dicit,* Deduc me in semita mandatorum tuorum, quia ipsam volui*: orat autem ut velit, cum dicit,* Inclina cor meum in testimonia tua, et non in avaritiam. *Hoc itaque orat, ut in ipsa voluntate proficiat.*

of our being and transfigure it. Grace not only respects, but intensifies and enlarges our freedom. The 'help' of grace means no division of labour: it does not mean that part of the work is ours, and part God's. Cardinal Bellarmine wrote that 'in the good work which we do by God's help, there is nothing of ours that is not God's, nor anything of God's that is not ours. God does the *whole* and man does the *whole*'.[143]

This may be further illustrated with reference to two texts from the Pelagian controversy. The first is from *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, where, again, the life of Paul provides a model. Paul, Augustine points out, not only says that 'by the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor. 15:10), but also notes that 'his grace in me has not been fruitless but I have laboured more abundantly than all of them' (1 Cor. 15:10). For the synergy to be correctly understood, a delicate balancing act must be performed. On the one hand, it must be understood that the grace of God works within a human being, so that it is not possible to attribute anything to human beings that has not come from God. And yet, God's grace really does work within human beings, really does make a difference. Although wholly dependent upon grace, Paul is nevertheless the author of his own abundant labours. Paul has not, Augustine is at pains to point out, *lost* his own will, but rather that will has been acted upon by grace. Thus, Augustine concludes, 'it was neither grace alone nor he himself alone, but the grace of God and himself together'.[144]

In a passage from *De Correptione et Gratia*, a similar point is made. The context here is a question about why preaching and paranetic instruction are necessary if all moral improvement is entirely a work of God's grace. The answer is that the action of the Holy Spirit upon human beings is something that does not simply make them passive recipients, but, rather, actively inspires and motivates them. Again, grace empowers rather than disempowers those to whom it is given:

> For they are acted upon that they may act, not that they may themselves do nothing; and in addition to this, it is shown them what they ought to do, so that when they have done it as it ought

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[143] Burnaby (1938), 239.

[144] *gr. et lib. arb.* 5.12: *nec gratia Dei sola, nec ipse solus, sed gratia Dei cum illo*; cf. 15.31. For statements about 'synergy', that are less characteristic of Augustine, cf. *gr. et lib. arb.* 17.33.

to be done – that is, with the love and the delight of righteousness – they may rejoice in having received the sweetness which the Lord has given, that their land should yield its increase.[145]

In this respect, grace mirrors original sin. For, as Augustine explains later in the work, 'those original sins...are said to be the sins of others, because individuals derived them from their parents; but they are not unreasonably said to be our own also, because in that one, as the apostle says, all have sinned'.[146] Human beings' sins are no less their own by virtue of the fact that they stem from Adam's original sin. Similarly, when it comes to grace, human beings' good works are no less their own by virtue of the fact that they stem from God's grace.

Once it has been understood that the synergy between God's will and human actions is not a matter of each party doing their bit in adding to the work of the other, but depends on God's grace from first to last, then it is possible to re-connect with the theme of discipline. It has been seen in the discussion in earlier chapters of the *Enarrationes'* teaching on the subject of public entertainment, and on the importance of almsgiving, that Augustine regularly exhorts his congregation to self-discipline. However, as he makes clear in *en. Ps.* 118, *suauitas* should rightly come before *disciplina*. Human beings must first have their wills moved, as the Holy Spirit pours love into their hearts. True *disciplina* comes when God's commandments have already become sweet to them, so that they want to obey. Those who have had love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit have an entirely new approach to God's law. When *disciplina* has priority, the commandments become 'not patterns for willing service, but a burden laid on reluctant shoulders'.[147] But, for those to whom God's law has become sweet, and therefore something that they actively want to keep: 'it is a law they will know through their own understanding and observe by loving choice in the wide freedom of love, not in the constriction of fear'.[148]

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[145] *corrept.* 2.4.
[146] *corrept.* 6.9.
[147] *en. Ps.* 118.26.8: *non erant opera volentium, sed onera potius invitorum.*
[148] *en. Ps.* 118.11.1.

Thus, there is a role for effort and striving in the life of human beings under grace. But such efforts are only of any use when viewed in the right context: that of God's prior initiative in pouring love into their hearts. Hence, as was argued in chapter two, Augustine's encouragement to his congregation not to attend public entertainments is based on an attempt not simply to forbid such attendance, but to evoke a love for God that would be powerful enough to mean that people ceased to wish to go. Similarly, as was argued in chapter three, the life of the monastery in Augustine's rule is based first and foremost on the necessity of love of God and neighbour.[149] Such love – which, of course, must be given by God – necessarily precedes detailed instructions about the monks' daily disciplines.

The emphasis on *disciplina*, viewed in its right context, goes some way towards answering the Pelagian assertion that to over-emphasise grace is to encourage slothfulness and laxity.[150] As Martin writes, 'Augustine found himself forced to walk a delicate line between grace and asceticism. How affirm the former without negating the latter?'[151] Thus, he argues in the expositions that grace does not abolish the efforts of human beings to live holy lives. Rather, grace entirely underlies and empowers these efforts, giving them the nature of a loving response to a call, rather than fearful obedience to a command.

As it is possible, once the priority of grace has been accepted, to re-connect with concepts of effort, good works, and discipline, so it is also possible to re-visit the language of fear. As has already been discussed, it is the weight of love upon the will of human beings that moves them to love God and thus to obey the commandments in freedom. Love, rather than fear, must be the motivating factor in the Christian life:

> When charity is made perfect it casts out fear of punishment (cf. 1 Jn 4:18), for charity sets us free, inspiring us to act not out of fear of punishment but out of delight in goodness. The kind of fear which makes us dread being punished, but instills no love of righteousness, is a servile fear;

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[149] Cf. *reg.* 1.2.
[150] Cf. Bonner (1986), 317, 355.
[151] Martin (2003), 10.

and because it is carnal, it is useless for crucifying the flesh. The will to sin remains unaffected and breaks out into action wherever one hopes to escape the consequences.[152]

However, the servile fear that man experiences 'under law' is very different from chaste fear, which is inspired by charity and casts out servile fear.[153] Within the context of grace, a new type of fear is experienced: a fear which is a function of love, and not its enemy: 'chaste fear bears this telltale mark, my brothers: it springs from love'.[154] Once it has been established that *suauitas* is in the lead, then *disciplina* is able to follow after. Commenting on Ps 118:38, *Establish your utterance for your servant, to make me fear you*, Augustine again emphasises that love casts out fear.[155] And yet, once this has happened, it is possible to speak of a new and quite distinct type of fear, equating to Isaiah's 'spirit of the fear of the Lord':[156]

This is a chaste fear that abides for ever, the fear that dreads any offence to the beloved. An adulterous wife fears her husband; so does a chaste wife, but differently. The adulteress fears that he may come home; the chaste wife, that he may leave her.[157]

Peter Brown writes that, after ten years as a bishop,

Augustine had become convinced that men needed...firm handling. He summed up his attitude in one word: *disciplina*. He thought of this *disciplina*, not as many of his more traditional Roman contemporaries did, as the static preservation of a 'Roman way of life'. For him, it was an essentially active process of correction, a 'softening-up process', a 'teaching by inconveniences' – a *per molestias eruditio* (*en. Ps.* 118.17.2).[158]

Brown's comment, indeed his whole chapter on the Donatist controversy, which he entitles *Disciplina*,[159] makes the disturbing suggestion – which it is beyond the scope of this chapter to follow up – that Augustine's treatment of the Donatists worked in the reverse order to that which has been described above. It

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[152] *en. Ps.* 118.25.7.
[153] *en. Ps.* 118.25.7: *Timore autem casto ipsa, quae hunc timorem foras mittit.*
[154] *en. Ps.* 127.8: *Castus ergo timor, fratres mei, hoc habet; venit de amore.*
[155] *en. Ps.* 118.12.3: *hunc enim consummata charitas foras mittit timorem*; cf. 1 Jn. 4:18.
[156] Cf. Is 11:3.
[157] *en. Ps.* 118.12.3; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.26.6; 31.3; *cat. rud.* 5.9; 17.26.
[158] Brown (1967), 236-7.
[159] Brown (1967), ch. 21.

suggests that, in the context of the Donatist controversy, discipline and fear take the lead, softening people up so as to make them more receptive to grace. Brown's use of *en. Ps.* 118.17, which is central to this chapter is, however. perhaps slightly misleading. For, in this exposition, Augustine does indeed speak positively of the role of discipline. Under the weight of discipline, the gift of charity increases, 'kindled more ardently the more the pressure mounts, like an enormous flame under the onslaught of the wind'.[160] But for charity to be kindled in such a way, it must be present in the first place. Thus, according to the logic of *en. Ps.* 118, the love poured into the hearts of men and women always precedes the pain that they will endure in their efforts to live good lives; *suauitas* always takes the lead over *disciplina*. It is not the case that God softens people up by correction and then goes on to love them, but rather the other way round: 'Those whom the Lord loves he corrects, and he whips every child whom he accepts'.[161]

d. Freedom

A question, however, remains about the extent to which, given the over-riding importance of grace, human beings can really be said to be free, and this has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate.[162]

Central to this is the comparison between the freedom that Adam enjoyed before and after the Fall. The original freedom given to Adam in the freshness of his creation was a gift of divine grace, a grace which, so to speak, was inherent in Adam's free will (*liberum arbitrium*). Thus, Adam did not live apart from grace, but grace was integral to his personality to such an extent that he would have been able to be good, had he so chosen. Adam's freedom was unconstrained since, although endowed with the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*), he was nevertheless free to sin if he chose to do so: 'such was the nature of the aid, that

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[160] *en. Ps.* 118.17.2: *sub eius pressura non possit exstingui, sed sicut ingens flamma sub impetu venti.*

[161] Heb. 12:6: *Quem enim diligit Dominus, corripit; flagellat autem omnem filium quem recipit*; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.13.3; 17.2; 31.2.

[162] Cf. Burnaby (1938), 219-52; Clark (1994), 49-57; Djuth (1999); Harrison (1993); (2000a), 111-4; Rist (1969); TeSelle (1970), 285-93. This discussion draws on all of these.

he could forsake it when he would, and that he could continue in it if he would'.[163]

After the Fall, human beings are endowed through Christ with a new freedom (*libertas*), which Augustine presents as superior even to the original, since 'if the son shall make you free, then you shall be free indeed'.[164] In the life of grace, the Holy Spirit pours love into the hearts of the faithful, so that they start to delight in the good, and cleave to it. It is this freedom which is at the very heart of the life of grace as Augustine describes it in his expositions of Ps. 118. As has been discussed, the characteristic description of men and women under grace is that they live in a wide space, with hearts that have been enlarged. They experience freedom from the power of the sin that lives in them;[165] they experience freedom from the debilitating constraints of a law that is unable to give them life;[166] they are freed from the servile fear that burdens them with commandments that they are unable to fulfil;[167] they are free from constraint, because they love God's law, and no longer want to break it.[168] The freedom that human beings experience under grace, far from being the 'freedom of indifference', is brought about by love: 'we have often pointed out that when we put God's commandments into practice we experience a wonderfully spacious freedom, which is to be identified with charity.'[169]

Crucially, however, this new freedom, unlike that given to Adam, is constraining: 'aid is brought to the infirmity of human will, so that it might be unchangeably and invincibly (*indeclinabiliter et inseperabiliter*) influenced by divine grace'.[170] Augustine compares the pre- and post-lapsarian states in the *City of God*. The former is marked by Adam's ability to choose for himself; the latter, by renewed humanity being irresistibly drawn towards the good:

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[163] *corrept.* 11.31.
[164] Jn. 8:36; cf. *corrept.* 12.35.
[165] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.2.2,3; 3.1.
[166] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118. 26.7.
[167] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.25.7.
[168] *en. Ps.* 118.25.7.
[169] *en. Ps.* 118. 22.1.
[170] *corrept.* 12.38.

For the first immortality, which Adam lost by sinning, consisted in his being able not to die; but the last will consist in his being not able to die. So too, the first free will consisted in his being able not to sin, and the last will consists in his being not able to sin.[171]

Scholars differ, however, about whether this new found freedom of fallen human beings, by which they steadfastly cling to the good, is real or illusory. On the positive side of the debate, Burnaby forcefully argues that Augustine continues to assert the freedom of the will. He urges that for Augustine, the will is. by definition, free and not subject to compulsion. For fallen human beings, to be endowed with *libertas* cannot and does not restrict their free will:

By freedom (*libertas*)...[Augustine] means the power, which man's fallen nature obviously does not possess, to choose and to accomplish the good. But the loss of *libertas* does not involve the loss of *liberum arbitrium*, which is not the *libertas indifferentiae*, the absolute power of choice between alternatives – that was the mistaken idea of Julian – but the spontaneity, the self-determination inherent in the will as such. *Cogi velle*, 'to be compelled to will', is a contradiction in terms: 'if I am compelled, I do not will' (*c. Iul. Imp.* 1.101). All choice is free choice, all will is free-will.[172]

In a similar vein, Harrison writes of the way in which, for Augustine, God's grace moves the hearts of the elect, not by an assault, but through *delectatio*, *persuasio*, *suavitas*, *voluptas*.[173] Thus, human beings find that their free wills, whilst they have been brought unfailingly towards the good, have not been over-ridden:

...divine grace is irresistible to the chosen few in whom it works, *not* because it over-rides and controls the will by making it a puppet, but because it unfailingly calls forth a response which corresponds with man's deepest desires and motivations, with his true identity and being as a creature of God, so that he is able to respond to it freely, wholeheartedly and in the way grace intends. This need hardly surprise us, given that man owes his being and free will to grace – should he not therefore find a *natural* fulfilment in responding to its action too? Grace can therefore be irresistible without being constraining; unfailing but not necessitating.[174]

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[171] *ciu.* 22.30.
[172] Burnaby (1938), 227; cf. Clark (1994), 52.
[173] Cf. Harrison (1993), 302.
[174] Harrison (1993), 300.

The extent to which such freedom is really meaningful is, of course, open to question. Such questioning has come, among others, from Rist, who argues that the question of whether or not human beings truly are free hinges on their ability, or otherwise, to resist divine grace. The key question, that which is most 'interesting and important philosophically',[175] therefore, is,

> ...whether those who are offered the grace of baptism and the grace of perseverance are bound to accept them, whether in fact any vestige of Adam's original freedom is left to them, whether in the case of the 'elect' grace is irresistible and the individual has no choice but to be 'free', to act rightly in all matters of ultimate significance for his soul.[176]

Rist concludes that, ultimately, for Augustine, the new act of God by which he binds fallen human beings to himself, 'can only occur at the sacrifice of one of the greatest gifts given to Adam, namely his ultimate autonomy on the matter of moral choice'.[177] Thus, he concludes that, for Augustine, human beings, although they may experience themselves as acting freely, are in fact, so overcome by grace that their freedom is illusory. Salvation comes entirely under God's control, and essentially 'man is a puppet, free in the sense only of being arranged to act in a way which is not subject to external pressures'.[178]

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to adjudicate between these two opposing sets of views, but some comments may be offered... For Augustine in *en. Ps.* 118, freedom cannot be approached as a 'zero sum game', in which divine action increases as human action decreases, and *vice versa*. Rather, as Burnaby and others argue, Augustine invites his congregation to believe that 'when the son makes you free, you shall be free indeed'; that God's over-riding initiative does not cancel out human actions and disempower the agents who carry those actions out, but actually enhances and empowers human freedom. It is in this sense that, as has already been argued, it is possible for him to present a true synergy that, while totally reliant on grace, is nonetheless a real synergy, and not just a case of

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[175] Rist (1969), 429.
[176] Rist (1969), 429.
[177] Rist (1969), 441.
[178] Rist (1969), 440.

a puppet master pulling strings. Such an understanding is summed up by O'Donovan,

> The dynamic of the Christian faith, calling us to respond appropriately to the deeds of God on our behalf, supposes that there is an appropriate conformity of human deed to divine act. It supposes that divine initiative and human response are two movements, distinct though not independent, both of them free; that free human response is not overwhelmed by the necessity of the divine deed on the one hand, and that the divine deed is not reducible to the exercise of human decision on the other. Moral fact and moral response are two. The divine and the human agents both have reality and both have freedom, even though the human reality and freedom are not at ontological parity with the divine but depend upon the divine from first to last.[179]

That the freedom described is true freedom is something that ultimately will be proved by experience: members of his congregation will know for themselves what it is to live in a wide space, with hearts enlarged, freed from fear and constraint.

As a further comment, it is important to get freedom into its proper perspective. The issue is a particularly topical one at the time this thesis is being written, since freedom is a concept often invoked in the media and in the political discourse of the western world. Thus, we hear about 'upholders of freedom', 'enemies of freedom', and even 'freedom fries'. However, this emphasis on freedom as an over-riding value goes hand in hand with a simultaneous, and contradictory, sense that the lives and decisions of human beings are, to a large extent, determined by factors outside their control. As O'Donnell comments,

> We are a culture blithe in our praise for freedom and our missionary zeal to share freedom with others, but at the same time obsessed with a series of discourses – political, ethical, medical – about the conflicts and limits of freedom, the illusory sense of control and responsibility that seems indispensable (otherwise how is society to control the impulses of the restless?) but at the same time philosophically not quite defensible. We act as though we are free, but we beg off the consequences of our actions by pleading incapacity.[180]

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[179] O'Donovan (1986), 36.
[180] O'Donnell (2005), 329-30.

Augustine's contention, explored in *De libero arbitrio*, is that free will, though a good, is an intermediate good, a *medium bonum*, capable of turning from the immutable to the mutable good, or *vice versa*.[181] Thus, in contrast to the widely-held view of modern western society, freedom is not in itself the highest good to which human beings may aspire. As Cessario comments,

> Some contemporary schools of Christian ethics prefer to adopt the dominant motifs of the German Aufklärung, with the result that we have become accustomed to hear from some quarters about human freedom as a transcendental category which, for all intents and purposes, obscures the status and purposes of human nature as they pertain to the moral life... The Christian tradition interprets human freedom with a metaphysics of creation, and considers the profound want of the human will for happiness and the ecstatic love of God which follows upon the beatific vision as voluntary though technically non-free activities.[182]

Cessario emphasises the importance of reflection upon the Christian moral life starting in the right place. This place is not, he argues, contrary to some strands of Enlightenment thought, a consideration of freedom, and the choices that confront human beings, but rather the more fundamental question of what makes for happiness and human flourishing in the first place.

The search for happiness also provides the context for Augustine's thought about the Christian life.[183] From an early age, he was schooled in the works of philosophers whose over-riding aim, as he expresses it in the *City of God*, was 'to discover what makes a man happy'.[184] Indeed, one of his earliest Christian works was entitled *On the Happy Life*.[185] And happiness is again the starting point in his expositions of Ps. 118, since this very theme is suggested by the opening words of the psalm, *Happy are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord*.[186] One can imagine Augustine feeling, for all the difficulties that he perceives in the interpretation of this psalm, that these opening words come as something of a gift. For they enable him, from the start of the

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[181] Cf. *lib. arb.* 2.20.54; cf. Harrison (2006), 212-3.
[182] Cessario (2001), 104-5.
[183] This section draws on Harrison (2000a), 79-82.
[184] *ciu.* 19.1.
[185] *De Beata Vita*, written in Cassiciacum in 386. The same comment might also be made of the Psalter as a whole; cf. *en. Ps.* 1.1.
[186] *Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini.*

expositions, to set the rules of engagement, by placing his words on the moral and spiritual life of human beings under grace within a eudaimonistic context:

> From its very first verse, dearest friends, this psalm urges us to seek happiness. Yet there is no one who does not long for this. Is there anyone, has there ever been anyone, will there ever be anyone, who does not want to be happy?... Why, then, do we need to be invited to will something that we are incapable of not willing? Only because, though men and women all long for happiness, many do not know how to reach it.[187]

Within a Christian context, the term 'happiness' has wide connotations. The term *beatitudo* expresses not only a present experience, but also a future hope. As Augustine returns to the theme at various points in the expositions, he explores this at several points. Commenting on Ps. 118:77, Augustine reflects on the simplicity of the Psalmist's request, *May your manifold mercies come upon me, and I shall live*.

> He does not say, 'I shall live for ever', or 'I shall live in happiness'; he takes it for granted that the only state really deserving of the name life is life without end and without any misery.[188]

Thus, it can be understood that 'the only life that deserves to be called simply 'life' without qualification is eternal, happy (*eterna et beata*) life'. True happiness thus has an irreducibly eschatological quality, which distinguishes it from the earthly happiness sought by philosophers who 'have supposed that the Final Good and Evil are to be found in this life'.[189] Indeed, acting righteously out of a wish to obtain earthly happiness is counter-productive: 'if anyone carries out God's commands with an eye to being rewarded with earthly happiness (*terrenae felicitatis*), that person's hands are not being lifted up but are drooping'.[190]

Happiness is, Augustine explains to his congregation in his introduction to the first exposition, 'so great a good that both good and bad people desire it'.[191]

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[187] *en. Ps.* 118.1.1.
[188] *en. Ps.* 118.19.4.
[189] *ciu.* 19.4.
[190] *en. Ps.* 118.14.4.
[191] *en. Ps.* 118.1.1.

Thus, even evil people are looking for happiness. They look for it in the wrong places, trying to achieve it through avarice, cruelty, or ambition, but they are still looking for it. It is, in other words, humanity's *summum bonum* – everyone aspires to it. In the words of the *City of God*, happiness is 'that for the sake of which other things are to be desired, while it is itself to be desired for its own sake'.[192] Because it is the *summum bonum*, happiness contrasts with free will. which is, as has been discussed, a *medium bonum*, capable of being turned either to good or evil. Freedom is not, then, seen as a good in itself, but freedom is always for the sake of something else. Freedom is freedom *for* happiness. As Cessario writes,

> Central to a realist conception of freedom remains the conviction that human choosing in itself does not constitute an ultimate value for human existence. When the ultimate Good...appears in beatific vision, our human freedom will discover no alternative but to embrace God, the supreme cause of beatitude. For the journey of Christian faith and the wayfarer who follows it, this eschatological destiny measures at each turn the deployment of authentic Christian freedom. The Christian tradition insists that true freedom remains ordered toward God; and the saints illustrate that only godly choices can authentically perfect our liberty and make us truly free...Christian theology mainly regards freedom as a special quality of an action, instead of an absolute ideal that crowns every action.[193]

It may indeed be the case, then, as Rist argues, that important and interesting philosophical questions hinge around the question of the extent to which, according to Augustine, the human will is free to resist the working of God's grace. However, these questions are not what Augustine is primarily addressing in this context. What, for him, comes first and foremost in these expositions, is the everlasting happiness into which God calls the elect. It is this, rather than an abstract notion of freedom that, rightly or wrongly, he believes constitutes human beings' chief good.

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[192] *ciu.* 19.1.
[193] Cessario (2001), 123.

3. *Scientia*

a. Knowledge and action

The letter of Pelagius, written in 413 to the fourteen-year-old aspirant nun, Demetrias,[194] provides a possible starting point for considering the role of knowledge in Augustine's account of the life of human beings under grace, as depicted in this group of expositions. Pelagius's letter, like the letters that Demetrias received from other influential churchmen such as Jerome, is written somewhat earlier than the date at which Augustine preaches on Ps. 118. It has been argued that *en. Ps.* 118 approaches its subject in a pastoral rather than a polemical mode, so it is not a direct response to Pelagius's letter, or to any other Pelagian work. And yet, the letter to Demetrias seems to provide a helpful comparison with this group of expositions because, like Augustine's expositions, Pelagius's work presents a fairly programmatic statement of his views about the Christian life and how it is to be lived out. Rees describes it as a 'large-scale map of the route to moral excellence, annotated with warnings of the traps and pitfalls along the road'.[195]

Evans comments that the letter reflects Pelagius's 'enduring preoccupation with the theme of *scientia*'.[196] For Pelagius, the question of knowledge has a historical dimension. By contrast with Augustine's emphasis on the importance of the original sin of Adam, the root cause of human beings' inability to keep the law lies, for Pelagius, in their development of bad habits which impede the choices of which they would otherwise be capable: 'that long habit of doing wrong which has infected us from childhood and corrupted us little by little over many years'. [197] The development of such habits is closely bound up with humanity's progressive loss of the natural knowledge of God, with which they have been implanted by God from their creation.[198] Pelagius divides history into three periods: the 'time of nature' stretches from Adam to Moses; the 'time of law' lasts from Moses to Christ; and the 'time of grace' is inaugurated by

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[194] On the background to *Ad Demetriam*, cf. Brown (1967), 340-5; Rees (1991), 29-35.
[195] Rees (1991), 32.
[196] Evans (1968), 112; cf. Bonner (1986), 174-5, 363.
[197] *ad Dem.* 8.3; for a discussion of Augustine's view of habit, cf. Rist (1994), 175-80.
[198] Cf. *ad Dem.* 4.2.

Christ.[199] Before the law was given, human beings, initially created strong, vigorous and with a natural knowledge of the good, became habituated to sinning. This habituation caused blindness to the natural law, which became increasingly serious as each generation passed on its skewed knowledge and bad habits to the succeeding one. This cumulative problem necessitated God's giving the 'file' of the written law, whose application to corroded human nature allowed it 'to recover its former brilliance'.[200]

The giving of the law is, thus, the decisive moment. Before it is given, bad habits are passed on to succeeding generations, because sin causes a corporate, cumulative blindness to what is good. But now, through the law (that of Moses and, to an even greater extent, that of Christ) God's commands have been stated with perfect clarity. Human beings' original, natural knowledge is thus repristinated through the revelation of Christ: 'now that we have been instructed by the grace of Christ and reborn as better men: purified and cleansed by his blood, encouraged by his example to pursue perfect righteousness, we ought surely to be better than those who lived before the time of the law, better even than those who lived under the law'.[201]

Thus, for Pelagius, what human beings primarily need is the revealed knowledge of the commandments of Moses and Christ that will bring them back to that natural knowledge of God's law that has now become dimmed. It is in the light of this knowledge that moral improvement becomes possible and moral laxity inexcusable. As Evans comments,

> What man needs in order that he may effectively recover his own nature is, objectively, revelation; subjectively, knowledge – knowledge that is so authentic, clear and compelling that the cloud of ignorance which presently hides his nature from himself will be done away. This knowledge is given to him in Scripture: in law, teaching and example.[202]

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[199] *ad Dem.* 5-8; cf. Evans (1968), 96.
[200] *ad Dem.* 8.2.
[201] *ad Dem.* 8.4.
[202] Evans (1968), 112.

Similarly, on an individual level, when contemplating any particular action, knowledge is also vital. To know what we are trying to achieve, to have a clear end in view is the necessary first step for putting in motion the process of decision making that will allow us to achieve it: 'every deed and every word, whichever it may be, is laid out for inspection in advance and its future is decided by thoughtful consideration.'[203] Thus, the first stage in Demetrias's journey of moral and spiritual improvement must be to attain that moral knowledge that will put the right aim within her sights: she must 'get to know the will of her Lord and seek out diligently what pleases him and what displeases him'.[204] Ultimately, it is, of course, more worthy of merit that we should do what God commands than that we should simply know it. And yet, if we are to obey the commandments, first we must know them:

> For it is impossible for anyone to please someone, if he does not know what it is that pleases him, and he could well give offence even by his vow of obedience, if he has not learned in advance how to obey. And just as doing the will of the Lord is more important than knowing it, so knowing is prior to doing; the former takes precedence in order of time, the latter in order of merit (*Et ut maius est voluntatem Domini facere quam nosse, ita prius est nosse quam facere*), and it is for this reason that the prophet says: 'And you, Israel, be not ignorant' (cf. Lev. 4; Num. 15); and the blessed Paul: 'And if any one does not recognise this, he shall not be recognised' (1 Cor. 14:38), and likewise elsewhere: 'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is' (Eph. 5:17).[205]

Preaching on what appears to be a double aspect to the Psalmist's volition in Ps. 118:20, *My soul has passionately wanted to desire your ways of justice*, Augustine reflects on a subject that is familiar from the *Confessions*, that of the divisions that human beings experience in their will. 'It is a remarkable fact', he tells his congregation, 'that we can long to have a certain desire yet not have the desire in us, although the wanting of it is in us already.'[206] The case study that he uses to illustrate this condition is that of someone who is ill and feels disgust for

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[203] *ad Dem.* 26.2.
[204] *ad Dem.* 9.1: *scire voluntatem Domini sui, et quid ei placeat, quidve displiceat.*
[205] *ad Dem.* 9.1.
[206] *en. Ps.* 118.8.4; cf. *conf.* 8.8.20-9.21.

food but yet, because he knows it will make him recover, earnestly wishes that he might start to desire it again:

> When someone is ill and feels a disgust for food, but wants to recover from his sickly condition, he certainly wants to desire food: this is implied in wanting to be free from his nausea. But in this case his nausea is an indisposition of the body, whereas the vehement wish to desire food – that is to be rid of the nausea – is not in the body but in the mind. It is not any pleasure in the palate or throat that conceives this vehement wish, because any such pleasure is inhibited by the nausea: it is the rational intention to recover one's health (*recuperandae ratio sanitatis*) and the anticipation that when health returns distaste for food will be banished. There is nothing remarkable if the mind has an appetite for bodily appetite (*si appetit animus ut appetat corpus*). In this situation there is an appetite in the mind but none in the body.[207]

The division within the man's will is brought about, as Augustine perceives it, by the rupture between the weak human soul, which finds God's precepts undesirable, and the conflicting rational perception that God's ways of justice are, like food to the sick man, useful, wholesome, and necessary for survival.[208] Thus it is that 'the intellect flies on ahead, but weak human feelings follow tardily, if at all'.[209]

It is hardly necessary to point out how sharply Augustine's account of the life of faith differs from that of Pelagius. The central issue here, however, is Pelagius's insistence on the priority of knowledge, his view that, given sure knowledge of God's commandments, human beings can progress towards them. If Pelagius were discussing a sick man who was off his food, the sick man would presumably simply buck his ideas up and eat, in the knowledge that eating was good for him. For Augustine, however, as has been argued, knowledge is simply not enough. Fallen human beings may have a rational apprehension that it is good for them to obey God's commandments, but the divisions within their will are such that they cannot bring themselves wholeheartedly to desire those commandments, or truly to follow them. Like the sick man, their rational

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[207] *en. Ps.* 118.8.4.
[208] *en. Ps.* 118.8.4: *Ac per hoc possunt infirmitate animae non desiderari; et ratione mentis, ubi videtur quam sint utiles atque salubres, potest earum desiderium concupisci.*
[209] *en. Ps.* 118.8.4: *Praevolat intellectus; et tarde sequitur, et aliquando non sequitur humanus atque infirmus affectus.*

apprehension of what they ought to want to do is not enough to bring them to do it, without the weight of love impelling their will towards it.

b. Knowledge and learning

The insufficiency, and indeed the dangers of knowledge, when treated in a particular way, are themes that have wider echoes in this group of expositions. As was seen in the discussion of the Preface to *en. Ps.* 118, Augustine's intention appears to be to hold together those who have much knowledge, together with the run of 'ordinary' Christians. No distinction is to be made between people on the basis of their knowledge, or lack of it. Indeed, the deceptive simplicity of the psalm itself might seem perhaps to mock those who think that large amounts of knowledge are sufficient to plumb God's mysteries.

At various points in the expositions, Augustine almost appears anti-intellectual, criticising those who familiarise themselves with the scriptures for the wrong reasons, searching the Lord's testimonies, 'so as to appear learned, rather than to be just';[210] those who are 'always avid to learn...but never arrive at knowledge of the Truth',[211] picking up 'useless, unprofitable scraps of knowledge.'[212] Augustine's suspicion of scholarly learning may, as Fredriksen argues, reflect a more general turning away from the liberal arts and the entire educational ideology of classical *paideia*, towards a starkly Pauline insistence that 'God chooses whom he wills'.[213]

However, it should also be noted that Augustine's criticism of intellectual curiosity, what he calls in the *Confessions*, the 'concupiscence of the mind...[which] masquerades as a zeal for knowledge and learning',[214] does not exhaust what he has to say on the subject of knowledge in this group of expositions. Rather, the Psalmist's prayer, *Teach me your ways of justice*, interpreted by Augustine as a request that he might grow in the knowledge of grace (*gratiae scientia*), is taken a stage further, into an exploration of the ways

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[210] *en. Ps.* 118.1.2: *quia malunt docti esse quam iusti.*
[211] *en. Ps.* 118.11.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 118. 5.1; 2 Tim. 3:7.
[212] *en. Ps.* 118.11.3: *discere perseverent vana et infructuosa*; cf. *en. Ps.* 55.10; 118.29.1.
[213] Cf. Fredriksen (1988), 112.
[214] *conf.* 10.35.54. The theme of curiosity is explored in ch. 2 above; cf. Bonner (1970), 548.

in which grace itself transforms knowledge. [215] Again, the seventeenth exposition reveals a similar pattern emerging in relation to *scientia* to that which has already been discussed with *disciplina*. If knowledge takes the lead over the love that is induced by sweetness, then it is indeed fruitless. Yet, once love is clearly established as being in the ascendant, knowledge finds its true place. As Augustine puts it, preaching on John's gospel, 'add love to knowledge, and knowledge will be useful, not in itself but through love'.[216] Once *scientia* is placed in its right position, subsequent to *suauitas* and *disciplina*, then it has a real and significant role to play:

> The third lesson he asks for concerns knowledge. He puts it last because if knowledge outranks charity in importance, it does not build anyone up but only puffs him up (1 Cor. 8:1). However, when charity in its sweet benevolence has grown so great that it cannot be quenched by the tribulations to which discipline subjects it, then knowledge will be profitable. Through the gift of knowledge a person comes to know himself better. He discerns what he has merited by his own acts and what gifts have been bestowed on him by God.[217] He realises that through those endowments he is capable of things he formerly knew to be impossible for him, things he certainly could not have done by himself.[218]

Viewed in this way, in its true position, knowledge becomes, like discipline, a function, and not an enemy, of grace. 'Grace', as Martin writes, 'is not only a question of the will, it is just as importantly one of the mind, as Augustine lays out a remarkable account of how grace transforms human intellect':[219] 'God teaches us sweetness by breathing delight into us, teaches discipline by sending the right measure of tribulation, and teaches knowledge by empowering us from within to understand'.[220] Again, in Ps. 118:34, *Give me understanding, and I will study your law*, Augustine insists on the central role of grace in acquiring true knowledge: 'only someone to whom the Lord grants understanding can know the

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[215] *en. Ps.* 118.16.6; cf. Martin (2003), 18.
[216] *Io. eu. tr.* 27.5.
[217] Presumably, nothing and everything!
[218] *en. Ps.* 118.17.2: *Tertia ponitur scientia; quoniam si magnitudine sua praecedit scientia magnitudinem charitatis, non aedificat, sed inflat. Cum ergo tanta fuerit charitas in bonitate suaui, ut tribulationibus non possit exstingui, quas adhibet disciplina, tunc utilis erit scientia, qua innotescit etiam sibi homo quid ipse meruerit, et quae a Deo donata sint ei, per quae posse se sciat quae se posse nesciebat, et per seipsum omnino non poterat.*
[219] Martin (2003), 17.
[220] *en. Ps.* 118.17.3.

law as it ought to be known'.[221] Commenting on Isaiah's words, *Unless you believe, you will not understand*,[222] Augustine reaffirms the synergy that has been explored above: human beings' progress in knowledge, like their progress in discipline, is *both* a real one which can rightly and properly be attributed to them, *and*, at the same time, is entirely of grace:

> We must conclude that our understanding develops to grasp more firmly the truths we have believed and that our faith grows to believe more firmly what we have begun to understand. By its very act of understanding the mind develops and thus penetrates the truths of faith more deeply. This process occurs not through our natural powers but by the help and gracious gift of God; it is a process not of nature but of healing, which imparts to a diseased eye the power to see.[223]

The grace by which God enables human beings to grow in knowledge is manifested in a variety of different ways, but ultimately 'God illumines the mind from himself, so that it not only grasps what is revealed to it by the truth, but progresses toward an understanding of the truth itself'.[224] This, like the giving of grace generally, is a work of the Holy Spirit. Only God himself, who is the truth, can illuminate the mind so directly that it is able to grasp and understand the truth. As is explained in *De Trinitate*, the Holy Spirit, who himself is identified with love, joins the knower to the thing that is known: 'The mind...and its love and knowledge are three things, and these three are one thing, and when they are complete they are equal'.[225] Crouse writes that, '[a]s Father and Son are joined by the bond of love who is the Holy Spirit, just so in the life of the soul it is the will, or love, which unites the knowing subject and the object known'.[226]

Moreover, God's direct and 'personal' illumination of the mind is also the work of Christ: 'the work of the Son and the work of the Spirit are one'.[227] Thus, we are led back to a subject discussed in chapter one, the work of Christ in *De*

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[221] *en. Ps.* 118.11.4: *Quanquam etiam ut sciatur lex quomodo scienda est...nisi a Domino acceperit intellectum.*
[222] Is 7:9, LXX; cf. *mag.* 11.37.
[223] *en. Ps.* 118.18.3; cf. Martin (2003), 18.
[224] *en. Ps.* 118.18.4: *et eam sic illuminat de seipso, ut non solum illa quae a veritate monstrantur, sed ipsam quoque proficiendo perspiciat veritatem.*
[225] Cf. *trin.* 9.4.4.
[226] Crouse (1999), 488.
[227] *en. Ps.* 32.3.5: *videte eadem opera Filii et Spiritus sancti.*

Magistro, and Augustine's reflection in this work on the difficulty of learning from words, verbal signs which 'merely intimate that we should look for realities...[but] do not present them to us for our knowledge'.[228] The inability of signs to convey meaning leads Augustine to the conclusion that only a prior affinity with the subject that we are attempting to learn will in fact enable us to learn about it: '…it is by knowing the realities that we also come to a knowledge of their words'.[229] This prior affinity is brought about by the direct illumination of Christ, the interior teacher. Christ's presence inside a learner ensures that 'he is being taught, not by...words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by the enlightening action of God from within'.[230] The particular closeness to Christ of those who are not only members of the human race, with whom Christ has become one,[231] but have also become members of Christ's body, the Church, and whose voice is joined with Christ's own voice in the words of the psalms, ensures that, through grace upon grace, true growth and progress in knowledge are possible.

Thus, within the context of love, new possibilities are opened up for learning. This is particularly apparent in *De Doctrina Christiana*. As has already been argued, when *scientia* is given undue prominence, and placed before grace, then it becomes simply an accumulation of useless knowledge, which serves to puff up rather than to edify, and may indeed positively harm people by bringing them into association with demons and superstitious practices.[232] Love, however, transforms the quest for knowledge, and brings about a graced *scientia*. Once it is understood that love of God and neighbour is the *terminus* of all knowledge, that it provides the true meaning of all scripture,[233] then study, particularly scriptural study, can be seen in a new light. Placed in the context of love and grace, scriptural interpreters may happily pore for ages over the minutiae of the text (as Augustine does in these expositions) and be assured that the knowledge that is thus acquired will be salutary and useful. Similarly, they can allow their

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[228] *mag.* 11.36.
[229] *mag.* 11.36.
[230] *mag.* 11.40; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 26.7; Lawless (1994), 30-32.
[231] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.16.6: *Per hanc eius participationem nobis gratia subministratur, ut caste timeamus Deum, et custodiamus mandata eius.*
[232] Cf. *doc. chr.* 2,35.39-20.44.
[233] Cf. *doc. chr.* 1.36.40.

imaginations to roam freely over different interpretations, knowing that if these ultimately point to love of God and neighbour, they will not have gone far wrong.[234] If these these two activities were to take place *outside* the context of grace, uninfected by the love that the Holy Spirit conveys, they would simply be pointless nit-picking or fruitless speculation.

Conclusion: Grace and preaching

Near the end of the fourth book of *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine emphasises the need for preachers to pray for grace to the God 'in whose hands are both we and our words':[235]

> ...whether you are at this very moment about to preach to a congregation, or give a talk to any kind of group, or whether you are on the point of dictating something that is to be preached to a congregation, or to be read by anyone who wishes and is able to, you should pray that God may put good words into your mouth.[236]

The passage links us back with Augustine's opening words in the preface to this group of expositions, where Augustine twice refers to the grace that he believes to have been at work in and through his preaching: it is 'with the Lord's gracious help' (*donante Domino*) that he has expounded the other psalms and that, likewise, he hopes that he will receive the help of God as he seeks to address the difficulties of interpretation with which the psalm presents him.[237] Grace is thus not only the *subject* that preoccupies him in the expositions but grace is also the *means* by which he or any preacher is able to preach at all. It is by grace also that God makes listeners able to learn correctly from what has been said, since 'nobody can correctly learn what is involved in living with God, unless he has been made docile to God by God'.[238]

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[234] Cf. *doc. chr.* 1.36.40-37.41; *conf.* 12.25.34-5.
[235] Cf. Wis. 7:16, quoted in *doc. chr.* 4.15.32.
[236] *doc. chr.* 44.30.63; cf. 4.15.32.
[237] *Et nunc quod tandem ad pertractationem eius accedo, quid in eo possim, prorsus ignoro: spero tamen, ut aliquid possim, adfuturum atque adiuturum Deum.*
[238] *doc. chr.* 4.16.33: *nemo recte discit quae pertinent ad uiuendum cum deo nisi fiat a deo docilis deo.*

Grace, then, is depicted not as being independent of the words of a preacher. but is able to work in and through observable human processes, of which preaching is one.[239] How, then, does preaching perform the works of grace that have been discussed in this chapter? Pre-eminently, this happens through *suauitas*. As Cavadini writes,

> ...if the truth is to be moving, it must be presented *suaviter* – sweetly – i.e., in such a way that it will delight the listener. Eloquence is the art of speaking sweetly... Scripture itself is characterized by such an eloquence; the role of the Christian tractator and doctor is to make its sweetness, its power to move to conversion, available to others.[240]

Suauitas is, as Cavadini points out, a particular feature of the preaching of Ambrose, as he is presented in the *Confessions*, in his ability to make the scriptures attractive to Augustine, where formerly they had seemed absurd.[241] In a theme that was discussed in chapter one, God uses the beauty that delights us in scripture and preaching to orientate the fallen wills of men and women towards himself.[242] Thus, in its ability to move the will by sweetness, the sermon can share the characteristics of the law of God itself as it is described in Psalm 118: 'how sweet are your words in my mouth!'[243] The ability of preaching to inspire love through its sweetness, and thus act as a channel of grace, gives it a sacramental function. Indeed, Lawless conjectures that 'had Augustine been present at the Council of Trent... he would have strongly urged the recognition of preaching as the eighth sacrament'.[244] As Harrison comments,

> The delight occasioned by Scripture or the preacher is not, as in classical practice, to be taken as an end in itself. Delight in the artistry of the preacher, or the literary form of Scripture, is meant to inspire love that points beyond them, to their inspiration and source, that is, to love of God. In other words, what ultimately matters is not the aesthetic form, the words themselves, or the style

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[239] Cf. Patout Burns (1995), 188.
[240] Cavadini (1995), 165.
[241] Cf. *conf.* 6.4.6.
[242] Cf. Harrison (2000b), 224.
[243] Ps. 118:102: *Quam dulcia faucibus meis verba tua*; cf. *en. Ps.* 118.22.7.
[244] Lawless (1994), 28.

used, but their content, their meaning, their intention or inspiration, and this can only be found in God himself.[245]

Preaching also has a role in inculcating *disciplina*. This, indeed, was a matter of dispute between Augustine and some of his contemporaries, particularly the monks of southern Gaul, who questioned whether, in the words of Patout Burns, an over-riding stress on 'the necessity and efficacy of divine grace makes the human agency of preaching, admonition, and exhortation superfluous and futile'.[246] Responding to this in *De dono perseuerantiae*, Augustine replies that, although all obedience to God is indeed inspired by God, since 'no one comes to me unless the Father draws him' (Jn. 6:65), yet, for those who have ears to hear, this process happens in and through the exhortation of the preacher.[247] As he writes in *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, '…when the gospel is preached, some believe and some do not, but those who believe, when they hear the voice of the preacher from without hear the Father and learn within, while those who do not believe hear the external word, but inwardly do not hear nor learn'.[248] Here again, then, grace is at work to bring discipline, but it does so through human agency, as when the prophet Nathan was sent by God to rebuke David.[249] The words of human preachers thus have an important role in encouraging discipline, but, as above, this is not simply a matter of encouraging people to be good through their own efforts, but by being the means whereby grace draws them towards the good.

Finally, preaching has a role in imparting *scientia*. Commenting on Ps 118:73, *Your hands have made me and moulded me; give me understanding*,[250] Augustine discusses how it is that God gives understanding, recalling the words of an angel to Daniel, 'I have come to give you understanding'.[251] Daniel has asked God for understanding, and yet the angel is the agent through whom this God-given understanding is received. God uses the angel to minister

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[245] Harrison (2000b), 226.
[246] Cf. Patout Burns (1995), 189-90.
[247] *perseu.* 14.37; cf. 14.34; 17.41-7.
[248] *praed. sanct.* 8.15.
[249] 2 Sam. 12:1-13; cf. *en. Ps.* 75.15.
[250] *Fecerunt me et finxerunt me, da mihi intellectum.*
[251] *Veni intellectum dare tibi.*

understanding to Daniel, and yet the illumination that the angel provides comes not from the angel himself, but from God. Thus, grace works in a variety of ways:

> God made the rational, intelligent mind of human beings, with which they can receive his light; and God made the angel into the kind of being who can bring about some change in the human mind to make it capable of admitting the divine light; and God works on the human mind to make it responsive to the angel's influence; and finally, God illumines the mind from himself, so that it not only grasps what is revealed to it by the truth but progresses toward an understanding of the truth itself.[252]

All true knowledge comes, ultimately, from God and, as has been argued above, knowledge is made possible by the work of Christ, the interior teacher, and by the Holy Spirit, who unites the knower with what is known. And yet, again, the processes of teaching and learning, dependent as they are on grace, work in and through human agency. As Augustine writes in the Prologue to *De Doctrina Christiana*,

> ...charity itself, which binds people together with the knot of unity, would have no scope for pouring minds and hearts in together, as it were, and blending them with one another, if human beings were never to learn anything from each other.[253]

The determining aim of preaching is indeed to teach.[254] But, as has been argued above, this is not about imparting miscellaneous pieces of information, but becomes a graced process, in which God's love brings a listener into true unity with the thing that is known and, indeed, with the teacher who seeks to convey it.[255]

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[252] *en. Ps.* 118.18.4.
[253] *doc. chr. Proœm*, 7.
[254] Cf. *doc. chr.* 4.12.28; Harrison (2000b), 220.
[255] Cf. *cat. rud.* 12.17.

Chapter Five: Conclusion
'Songs of Love'

The commandment of charity is higher than the skies and higher than all books; for the books are subordinate to it and the tongues of all saints fight in its service, as does every movement, spiritual or physical, on the part of God's stewards. Charity is the supereminent way, and we can rightly say that God covers the higher regions of the sky with waters because you will find nothing loftier than charity in the sacred books.[1]

1. Love is the motivation for preaching and pastoral activity

It is clear that Augustine found certain aspects of his role as a bishop arduous and tiresome. Commenting on Ps. 118:115, *Go away from me, you spiteful people, and then I will thoroughly explore the commandments of my God*,[2] he remarks that the Psalmist 'wants spiteful people to leave him alone, and he even drives them away by force, so that he may come to know God's commandments in a spirit of love'.[3] The comment soon turns to a reflection on Augustine's own ministry, and the way in which the episcopal duty of arbitrating vexatious lawsuits among Christians in the civil courts robs him of the time for reflection and loving study of God's commandments:[4] 'they do not go away and leave us alone; they insist and crowd in on us and plead and rant and pester...'[5]

Passages such as this highlight the fact that, for Augustine, the relationship between the contemplative life, and the active life of preaching and pastoral engagement which he pursued as a bishop and priest in Hippo, could be a tense one. It seems likely that, had Augustine not been forcibly ordained, he would probably have sought the peace of monastic life, modelled on his experience in Cassiciacum.[6] Brown portrays Augustine's time in Thagaste prior to ordination as a period spent in a liminal situation, contemplating the differences between the life of *otium*, to which he was temperamentally drawn, and the primarily active

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[1] *en. Ps.* 103.1.9.
[2] *Declinate a me, maligni, et scrutabor mandata Dei mei.*
[3] *en. Ps.* 118.24.3.
[4] Cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-4; cf. *op. mon.* 37. On Augustine's role in civil society, cf. Lancel (2002), 259-64; Van der Meer (1961), 259-60.
[5] *en. Ps.* 118.24.3: *non recedunt nec declinant a nobis; sed instant, urgent, precantur, tumultuantur, extorquent...*; cf. *en. Ps.* 46.5.
[6] Cf. Torchia (1999), 235.

life of preaching and pastoral engagement, which would soon be his. This, Brown argues, appears to be anticipated in a passage from his *De Genesi aduersus Manicheos*:

> The two years which Augustine spent at Thagaste are marked by even more significant, though more mysterious changes. At this time, Augustine was a contemplative. His view of the Days of Creation in his commentary on Genesis is a faithful mirror of his own state of mind: he was still contemplating the 'lights in the firmament', 'spiritual meanings', shining clear and distant before the mind: outside, however, there lay the 'beasts of the sea and air', a fuller life of action, which had not yet dawned for him, with the 'whales' of great deeds, cleaving the rough waters of the world, and the words of preachers 'flying' through the air.[7]

Augustine's letter to Valerius shortly after ordination expresses his sense of the demands that his new vocation will make upon him.[8] He asks for time in order to study, not because he feels that his theological understanding is deficient, for he tells Valerius, 'I know and hold with firm faith all that is necessary for my own salvation'.[9] However, the tasks of his new ministry do demand a change of key: a more outgoing orientation, and the ability not simply to know things for himself, but to make use of what he knows 'for the salvation of others'.[10]

Some of the tensions that seem to have been part of Augustine's own experience have been explored in chapter one, in relation to the figures of Idithun and of the Psalmist in Ps. 54. Both of these are characterised by Augustine as wishing essentially to absent themselves from interaction, and, in particular, from pastoral demands, Idithun by staying silent, and the Psalmist by soaring away like a dove in order to be at rest. Both of these attempts at escape are thwarted by charity,[11] which calls them back to social interaction, to preaching and pastoral engagement. Similarly, in chapter three, it was argued that Augustine's presentation of ascent in the *Enarrationes* is essentially social, corporate, and ecclesial. Ascent to the heavenly city requires continued engagement with others, rather than escape from them.

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[7] Brown (1967), 135; cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.15.43.
[8] This letter was discussed in ch. 1.
[9] *ep.* 21.
[10] Cf. Harrison (2006), 13.
[11] Cf. *en. Ps.* 54.10.

Torchia comments that, 'a growing sense of responsibility to the temporal needs of his congregation, coupled with an increasing emphasis on charity as the basis of his ethics, contributed to a balancing of contemplation and action in Augustine's writings and life'.[12] This balanced approach is particularly evident in book nineteen of the *City of God*, where Augustine comments on Varro's discussion of the relative value of three contrasting lifestyles, the life of leisure, the life of action, and the life which combines the two. Augustine comments that none of these is inherently preferable, so that 'a Christian might conduct his life in any of these ways and still attain to everlasting rewards'.[13] What is primarily important is not the particular lifestyle that is chosen, but whether it is undergirded by love of God and neighbour.

> Thus, it is the love of truth which seeks a holy leisure, while it is under the impetus of love that we should undertake righteous business. If this latter burden is not imposed on us, we should devote our freedom to the search for and contemplation of truth. But if it is imposed on us, it is to be undertaken because of the impetus of love; and even then the delight in the pursuit of truth should not be entirely forsaken. For if these pleasures were to be taken away from us, our burden might prove too great for us.[14]

The life of holy leisure is good if motivated by the love of God and the consequent wish to contemplate him. The life of active engagement with the world is good if motivated by love of neighbour. And the two loves coinhere, so that those who live contemplative lives should not do so in a way that takes no thought for the welfare of their neighbours. Equally, those who lead active lives should not be so active that they feel no need for contemplation.[15] For sure, contemplation has a certain priority, since it extends into the life of heaven: 'the part of Martha passes, but the reward given for it passes not... That which Mary chose increased and did not pass.'[16] However, both active and contemplative lives can be motivated by love.

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[12] Torchia (1999), 235.
[13] *ciu.* 19.19.
[14] *ciu.* 19.19.
[15] Cf. *ciu.* 19.19.
[16] *s.* 179.4; cf. Burnaby (1938), 66; Torchia (1999), 233.

A similar comment might be made about life in community and life in the secular world. As was argued in chapter three, for Augustine, the monastic life of 'brothers living together in unity' embodies love in ways that are particularly transparent, reflecting the divine life of the Trinity, and anticipating the heavenly life of the future, 'life for evermore'.[17] However, Zumkeller comments that Augustine was not a monastic eulogist and, by contrast with some contemporaries, did not see the life of a religious community as a haven of perfect joy, peace and security on earth:

> ...it was clear to him that thinking of anticipating the life of heaven nonetheless required us to limit and adapt ourselves according to the demands of life on this earth. He repeatedly protested against notions of monastic life which ignored this, and thus became exaggerated and distorted. Again and again he impressed it upon monks that, however great their inclination toward contemplative living might be, pure contemplation is reserved for the life that is to come and that one must be prepared to sacrifice the inactivity of monastic withdrawal (*otium*) when the obligations of love (*necessitas caritatis*) and above all, one's apostolic ministry (*necessitates ecclesiae*) demand it.[18]

As with active and contemplative life, so with monastic and secular life, what is ultimately important is not the particular style of life, but that it should be motivated and inspired by love. Perhaps it could be said that different types of life model love in distinctive ways. The contemplative life does so by fixing its loving gaze on the truth in the purity of contemplation; the monastic life by forming loving relationships in a community directed towards God.[19] Similarly, the life of preaching and pastoral engagement models love by the particular way in which those who lead it must leave the safe space of *otium* and engage with (sometimes difficult) others, continually giving out what they have received.

Underlying the possibility of any sort of love is the work of Christ. For Christ's work underpins the pastor's or preacher's devotion to preaching and pastoral

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[17] Cf. Ps. 132.
[18] Zumkeller (1986), 123-4.
[19] Cf. *reg.* 1.2.

work. Those who do such work not only look to Christ's kenotic love as an example of self-giving and other-directedness, but also realise that their efforts entirely depend on the work of Christ in the Incarnation. Commenting at the start of his exposition of Ps. 90, Augustine reflects on the call to imitate Christ. Such imitation cannot consist of attempting the mighty works of the One through whom everything was made, such as walking on the sea or raising the dead, or healing the blind. Rather, he tells his congregation: 'you must concentrate on what he became for your sake; that is what you are to imitate in him'.[20] Imitation of Christ means bearing, in the strength of Christ, the vexations of this life, being neither 'entrapped by a bait nor broken down by fear'.[21] It is in this way that, in the words of the Psalmist, a person may dwell within the help of the Most High, and abide under the protection of the God of heaven.

For Augustine, preaching and pastoral engagement are nothing more nor less than an expression of love for God and neighbour. They are not the only ways that these two co-inherent loves can be expressed, but their outgoing and other-directed quality enables them to reflect the work of Christ, which itself animates them, in particularly vivid ways.

2. Love is the context of preaching

Although theoretically the works of preaching and pastoral engagement mirror Christ's kenotic love, and those who undertake them for the well-being of others should not automatically be suspected of wanting to aggrandise themselves - 'he that desires the episcopate desires a good work',[22] - in practice, things may be somewhat different. This is particularly clear in Augustine's discussion of *ambitio saeculi*, the third of the threefold temptations in book ten of the *Confessions*. Standing at the threshold of his episcopal career, Augustine reflects upon the way in which those who are honoured in society discover that the devil 'scatters popular plaudits to trap us, so that as we eagerly collect them we may be caught unawares and abandon our delight in your truth to look for it instead in

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[20] *en. Ps.* 90.1.1: *Quod factus est propter te, hoc in eo debes attendere, ut imiteris.*
[21] *en. Ps.* 90.1.3: *nec illecebra capiatur, nec timore frangatur.*
[22] 1 Tim. 3:1, quoted in *ciu.* 19.19.

human flattery'.[23] Indeed, it is the temptation to *ambitio saeculi* that O'Donnell in his biography of Augustine especially (over?)stresses as Augustine's besetting sin.[24]

However, the fact that the preacher and pastor should resist some of these seductions of his office does not mean that he should not enjoy being loved at all. Rather, the problems occur when 'the affection and honour we receive come to be something we enjoy not for [God's] sake but in [God's] stead'.[25] A distinction appears to be made between a desirable situation in which pastor and congregation enjoy one another in the Lord,[26] and one that is most definitely undesirable, when love of the pastor gets in the way of loving God, who alone is ultimately to be enjoyed.[27] A similar distinction seems to be made at the start of Augustine's sermon on Jn. 1:32-3, when he reflects on the large numbers that have come to the basilica on that particular day:[28]

> I see that, because of a desire for listening and a holy devoutness, you have come together in unusual numbers. May God through our mouth fulfil your expectation, for you have loved so much that you came. But what is it you have loved? If us, this too is good; for we want to be loved by you, but we do not want to be loved in ourself. Therefore, because we love you in Christ, love us in return in Christ; and let our love for one another voice its moaning to God, for moaning is itself characteristic of the dove.[29]

The passage again makes clear that the ultimate purpose of the preaching (or other types of pastoral engagement) is not that the preacher and congregation should love each other for themselves, but that both should dwell together in the love of God. However, it goes further than this. When preacher and congregation are united by their mutual love in a love for God, things take on a new momentum. It is in these circumstances that their combined efforts are animated with love by the Holy Spirit, since 'the Holy Spirit teaches us to moan.

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[23] *conf.* 10.36.59.
[24] Cf. O'Donnell (2005), 87-91.
[25] *conf.* 10.36.59.
[26] Cf. *doc. chr.* 1.22.20-1; 32.35; 33.37.
[27] Cf. *doc. chr.* 5.5.
[28] Probably in the winter of 406/7; cf. Fitzgerald (1999b), 474.
[29] *Io. eu. tr.* 6.1.

For he makes known to us that we are in exile, and he teaches us to sigh for our native land, and we moan with that very longing.'[30]

A similar point is again made in *De catechizandis rudibus*, in a passage discussed in chapter one. Augustine discusses the difficulties encountered by catechists when they have to repeat material that is very familiar to them. This weariness can be breached only through love; through the love of the catechist and student for one another, the well-known material that is taught comes to be refreshed with a beauty that is 'ever new'. When the sharing of the faith takes place within a social context that is animated by love, knowledge is not only communicated from catechist to student, but also freshly illuminated for the catechist:

> Now, if we find it distasteful to be constantly rehearsing familiar phrases that are suited to the ears of small children, we should draw close to these small children with a brother's love, or a father's or a mother's, and as a result of our empathy with them, the oft-repeated phrases will sound new to us also. For this feeling of compassion is so strong that, when our listeners are touched by us as we speak and we are touched by them as they learn each of us comes to dwell in the other, and so they as it were speak in us what they hear, while we in some way learn in them what we teach.[31]

The relationship between preacher and congregation is thus not incidental to the effectiveness of preaching, but of its very essence. Preaching is an inescapably social process involving not just a vertical relationship between members of the congregation and God, but also a horizontal relationship with the preacher. *Together* preacher and congregation dwell in the love of God in a way that they could not achieve as individuals travelling 'from the alone to the alone'. If a congregant were simply to read the edifying words of a sermon, outside the context of this relationship, then these would not have the same effect, a reason, perhaps, for Augustine's stress on the fact that a preacher's lifestyle carries more weight than his style of oratory.[32] For, although the power of the truth is such that ultimately the 'sacrament' of the word is not invalidated when it is administered by an unworthy preacher, it is made far more efficacious when

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[30] *Io. eu. tr.* 6.1.
[31] *cat. rud.* 12.17.
[32] Cf. *doc. chr.* 4.27.59.

shared inside a relationship of love. In a process that was explored in chapter one, sermons do their work not just by instructing and edifying their listeners, but by drawing them into a true community constituted by the body of Christ.

3. Love animates preaching

At the end of chapter four, the role of the sermon as an instrument of grace was emphasised: preachers should not only teach the word of Scripture, though this is, of course, a vitally important aim, but they should also make that word delightful to their congregations, inspiring love for the realities described.[33] As O'Donnell writes, 'the ideal congregant in Augustine's eyes would be the one who went away thinking that she or he had seen something, had tasted something, had glimpsed the real thing'.[34] A sermon cannot achieve any of its objectives if it fails to turn the will of human beings towards God and neighbour. As Augustine, near the start of his episcopate, writes to Simplicianus, delight is *the* way in which God orients fallen human beings to love of the truth:

> [Who has it in his power] to have such a motive present in his mind that the will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which he bestows. [35]

Of relevance here is Augustine's re-evaluation of the passions in books nine and fourteen of the *City of God*.[36] By contrast with Stoic and Platonic thought, Augustine does not relegate the passions to the sphere of the irrational, but ascribes value to them if they are properly oriented by the will, and able to function in accordance with rationality. Thus, the goal of a wise man should not simply be to free himself from passion,[37] for the presence or absence of passions

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[33] Cf. Harrison (2000),
[34] O'Donnell (2005), 133.
[35] *Simpl.* 1.2.21; cf. Harrison (2000), 223.
[36] This section draws on Harrison (2000), 93-4; O'Daly (1999), 155-9; Zumkeller (1986), 220-2. This subject was also briefly discussed in ch. 3.
[37] Cf. *ciu.* 9.4.

is a secondary issue: '(w)hat is important...is the quality of a man's will... [I]f the will is perverse, the emotions will be perverse; but if it is righteous, the emotions will be not only blameless, but praiseworthy.[38] From both the Old and New Testaments, Augustine adduces examples (including those of Paul and Jesus himself) to prove that the passions can have a positive role to play in the Christian life.[39] This is particularly so of *com*passion, which, because it is always motivated by love of neighbour, will invariably have such a role: 'what is compassion but a kind of fellow-feeling in our hearts for the misery of another which compels us to help him if we can?'[40] Zumkeller remarks that '[m]ore and more the conviction grew in him that man's emotional life, since it is willed and created by God, is good in itself'.[41]

However, the passions do not always work in harmony with reason. An example of this that was discussed in chapter four is Augustine's depiction of a sick man who desperately wants to desire food because, rationally, he knows that it will make him better. In order to achieve the necessary congruence between emotion and reason, preaching has a necessarily aesthetic dimension: 'God's name is delightful to those who love him more than any delight'.[42] The preacher's aim is to stir up the emotions, so that members of the congregation can truly love and give willing assent to things that, intellectually, they have already accepted. Reflecting on Christ's words in John, 'no one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me',[43] Augustine emphasises the part which pleasure has to play in the drawing of human beings towards Christ:

> I say, it is not enough by will, you are also drawn by pleasure. What does it mean to be drawn by pleasure? 'Take delight in the Lord, and he will grant you your heart's requests' (Ps 36:4). There is a certain pleasure of the heart to which the heavenly bread is sweet bread. Moreover, if it was allowed to a poet to say, 'his own pleasure draws each man',[44] not need but pleasure, not obligation, but delight, how much more forcefully ought we to say that a man is drawn to Christ

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[38] *ciu.* 19.6.
[39] Cf. *ciu.* 14.7, 9; *en. Ps.* 118. 4.1; 14.4.
[40] *ciu.* 9.5.
[41] Zumkeller (1986), 220.
[42] *en. Ps.* 51.18: *Nomen ergo Dei iucundum est amantibus Deum super omnes iucunditates.*
[43] Jn. 6:44.
[44] Vergil, *Ecl.* 2.64; cf. Rettig (1988), 262, n. 13.

who delights in truth, delights in happiness, delights in justice, delights in eternal life - and all this is Christ?[45]

Preaching must then take into account what Williams calls the 'fundamentally desirous nature'[46] of human beings. Thus, as has been discussed on several occasions above, Augustine rejects Pelagius's account of the Christian life as a rationalistic 'choice between two ways',[47] in favour of one that is based far more on desire and love:

Give me one who loves, and he feels what I am saying. Give me one who desires, give me one who hungers, give me one travelling and thirsting in this solitude and sighing for the fountain of an eternal homeland, give me such a one, and he knows what I am saying. But if I speak to someone coldly unresponsive, he knows not what I speak.[48]

An example of a way that, in practice, Augustine attempts to do this has been discussed in chapter two, in relation to his teaching on the *spectacula*. Here, it was argued, it is not enough for people simply to be forbidden from attendance. Rather, successfully or otherwise, Augustine sees his job as that of inspiring in his congregation a greater love for the beauty of the spectacles that God provides than they have for public entertainments. It is not enough for members of his congregation simply to cease attending the shows because they have been instructed to do so. Rather, they must cease attending because they no longer want to go; because the weight of love has moved their wills, so that they do what is right willingly, rather than being compelled to do it out of fear.

It is clear from the *Enarrationes* that Augustine sees the Psalms as particularly helpful texts in this task of evoking desire. The task of the preacher is made easier, because what is required fundamentally goes with the grain of the Psalter itself. The Psalms themselves are desirous texts for desirous human beings. There are a number of reasons why this seems to be so.

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[45] *Io. eu. tr.* 26.4.
[46] Williams (1989), 139.
[47] *ad Dem.* 3.1: *in hac utriusque libertate partis, rationabilis animae decus positum est.*
[48] *Io. eu. tr.* 26.4: *Da amantem, et sentit quod dico. Da desiderantem, da esurientem, da in ista solitudine peregrinantem atque sitientem, et fontem aeternae patriae suspirantem: da talem, et scit quid dicam. Si autem frigido loquor, nescit quid loquor.*

Most obvious among these, perhaps, is the popularity of the psalms' musical settings.[49] 'These words of the psalm', Augustine says as he begins to preach on Ps. 132, 'this lovely sound, this song equally sweet as a melody sung or a message understood, has given birth to monasteries'.[50] Van der Meer notes that psalm singing in churches of the west was undergoing something of a revolution in the time of Augustine, as, under the influence of Ambrose, drawing on eastern practice, the established responsorial method of psalm singing[51] gave way to an antiphonal one. Although it is unclear from the *Enarrationes* and other sources which of these was used by Catholics in Hippo, or whether it was some mixture of the two,[52] the love of Augustine's congregation for these musical settings is clear. Indeed, although Augustine records in the *Confessions* some concerns about the ability of music to deflect attention from God, rather than aid piety,[53] he also (un-Stoically) emphasises the fact that, in the period immediately after his baptism, liturgical music was able stir his emotions and passions in ways that were good and edifying:

> How copiously I wept at your hymns and canticles, how intensely was I moved by the lovely harmonies of your singing Church! The voices flooded my ears, and the truth was distilled into my heart until it overflowed in loving devotion; my tears ran down, and I was the better for them.[54]

A further important characteristic of the Psalms' ability to evoke desire is their fundamental restlessness, encountered, among other things, in their open-ended quality, their changes of mood,[55] their refusal to go on consistently saying the same thing for any length of time. These characteristics of the psalms were not without enormous challenges for Augustine as their Christian interpreter.[56] But,

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[49] Cf. Van der Meer (1961), 326-9.
[50] *en. Ps.* 132.2: *Ista enim verba Psalterii, iste dulcis sonus, ista suavis melodia, tam in cantico quam in intellectu, etiam monasteria peperit.*
[51] Van der Meer (1961), 326: 'According to ancient custom the whole psalm was sung through by a soloist in an ornate, somewhat shrill melody with many melismas, while a number of other singers, or possibly the whole congregation, repeated one verse after each different verse sung by the soloist'.
[52] As Van der Meer points out, there are mentions both of voices singing in unison (cf. *en. Ps.* 18.2.132.2.4; 43.13), and also of the work of a cantor (cf. *en. Ps.* 138.1).
[53] *conf.* 10.33.49.
[54] *conf.* 6.14.
[55] Cf. *en. Ps.* 30.4.1.
[56] Cf. Fiedrowicz (2000), 28-37.

as is seen countless times in the *Enarrationes*, for Augustine such challenges are a spur to ingenuity and fresh endeavour: to pierce beneath the letter to the spirit: to go behind the *signum* in order to encounter the *res*: 'bear with us patiently while we disentangle [the psalm] as best we can'.[57] Thus, for the Christian interpreter, an important part of the psalms' restlessness is their continual pointing to new depths of meaning, to what Fiedrowicz describes as a *sensus plenior* which prolongs and deepens 'that fullness of the literal sense already present in the original wording, and so brings to the literal sense its authentic value'.[58] Ultimately, of course, the *sensus plenior* leads to Christ himself who is continually present in the Psalms, as Augustine makes clear from the very beginning of his expositions.[59] This restlessness of the text of the psalms and the restlessness that they impose on Christian preachers and those who listen to their sermons is, again, fundamentally linked to their capacity to evoke desire. Restlessness is fundamental to desire for God: 'our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you'.[60]

A final aspect of the Psalms' desirous nature is, perhaps, their sheer physicality. They continually speak of a good creation that has been 'drenched with the grace of God;'[61] of the beauty of a created reality that, because it is beautiful, 'speaks of the beauty of the artist';[62] 'the sky and the earth, his visible and his invisible creations bear witness in their own way to his goodness and greatness'.[63] Although it is arguably the case that Augustine presents the natural beauty of the Psalter's landscape in a somewhat over-theologised way, perhaps nervous of the dangers of the type of curiosity that draws the eye towards the natural world and away from its creator,[64] nonetheless the biblical landscape can be used with powerful effect. For example, Lawless, commenting on *en. Ps.* 132, notes the profusion of liquid images, evoking desire in a hot country:

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[57] *en. Ps.* 51.1.
[58] Fiedrowicz (2000), 37.
[59] *en. Ps.* 1.1: 'Blessed is the person who has not gone astray in the council of the ungodly. This statement should be understood as referring to our Lord Jesus Christ, that is the Lord-Man.' Cf. *en. Ps.* 44.16; 96.2; 98.1.
[60] Cf. *conf.* 1.1.1.
[61] *en. Ps.* 103.3.8; cf. Harrison (2006), 215.
[62] *en. Ps.* 145.5; cf. 76.14; 145.12.
[63] *en. Ps.* 118.27.1.
[64] Cf. *conf.* 10.35.57; Fiedrowicz (2000), 32; O'Donnell (2005), 348, n. 119; Zumkeller (1986), 220.

Oil trickling down the beard of Aaron symbolises anointing by the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, whereas Jordan's waters and the pool of Bethesda are types of baptism. Dew of Hermon. hills of Sion, Noah and the flooded fields enable the listener from the countryside of Hippo to resonate with the mystery of the church and the sacraments of initiation. People accustomed to a hot African sun are likely to delight in the many illustrations of liquid imagery scattered throughout the text; allusions, therefore, to oil and water make a strong appeal to a congregation which is familiar with a hinterland encircled by the sands of the Sahara.[65]

So, the preacher, with texts at his disposal that are fundamentally desirous, aims to evoke desire in his congregation, thus re-orienting their wills towards God and their neighbour. Finally, however, it is important to re-emphasise that sermons are works of grace, and not simply examples of a new humanly-generated form of rhetoric. As Lawless points out, preaching is always subservient to the ministry of the incarnate Word of God:

> To teach or instruct (*docere*), to sustain attention 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.[66]

As was especially argued in chapter four, the love that works on the wills of fallen human beings is always ultimately the love that is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5). Of this love, the preacher may be the channel or the agent, but is never the origin. It is ultimately God's hands that 'hold us and our sermons alike'.[67]

4. Love is the content of preaching

Previous chapters of this thesis have, at many points, highlighted that love is the essential content of what Augustine has to say to his congregation in the *Enarrationes*. To recall these briefly, in chapter two it was argued that Augustine encourages love and delight of God's *spectacula*, in order to

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[65] Lawless (1982), 532-3.
[66] Lawless (1994), 29.
[67] *doc. chr.* 4.28.63, *in cuius manu sunt et nos et sermones nostri*; cf. Wis. 7: 16; *en. Ps.* 118.2.1; 23.5.

counteract the attractions of public entertainments. In chapter three, love for the heavenly city of Jerusalem, the goal of ascending pilgrims, yields teaching on the importance of love in monastic life and in the life of the Church, particularly expressed in the practice of almsgiving. Chapter four explored Augustine's presentation, in his expositions of Ps. 118, of the way in which love actually works in the lives of individual men and women under grace. Conscious of the need to avoid repetition, these concluding remarks on love as the content of preaching will concentrate on an aspect of love suggested in chapter three: the essential unity of love as Augustine presents it in his preaching, and particularly in the *Enarrationes*.

When the Prince in the Disney film, Snow White, sings, 'One love, I have but one love',[68] he clearly means it in an exclusive sense. His wholehearted devotion to the princess entirely over-rides his love for everything and everyone else. By contrast, if Augustine were to make the same statement, it would denote the fact that, for him, love is essentially a unity: in one love, all other loves are included. Commenting on Ps. 118:20, *My soul has passionately wanted to desire your ways of justice at all times*,[69] Augustine, in a dense formulation, asks, 'what can be loved by loving if love itself is not loved?'[70] He goes on to explain that the Psalmist wants to love love itself. Since 'the only – or at least the principal – requirement of the commandments is love, he now proclaims that he wants to love that love'.[71] Similarly, in *De Trinitate*, commenting on 1 Jn. 4, Augustine stresses the inseparability of the commands about love of God and neighbour:

> Thus we infer that those two commandments cannot exist without each other: because God is love the man who loves love certainly loves God; and the man who loves his brother must love love.[72]

Considerable care is obviously necessary when making such a statement, for, as has been explored in chapter three, it is important to stress that this unified love

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[68] A favourite of the author's three-year-old daughter.
[69] *Concupivit anima mea desiderare iustificationes tuas in omni tempore.*
[70] *en. Ps.* 118.8.3: *Quid autem diligendo diligitur, si ipsa dilectio non diligitur.*
[71] *en. Ps.* 118.8.3: *...in quibus dilectio praecipitur vel sola vel maxime; et ipsius dilectionis dilectionem se velle habere proclamat.*
[72] *trin.* 8.12.

does not include, for example, the impure love that inflames the soul, luring it towards the pursuit of earthly things,[73] or the love of material things forbidden by the commandment, 'you shall not covet (Ex. 20:17)'; or, the 'passionate craving whereby flesh lusts against spirit'.[74] Augustine argues, in *en. Ps.* 118, that it is possible to distinguish between good and evil types of concupiscence, because the former is always given an object (as in 'powerful longing for wisdom leads to a kingdom'[75]), whereas in the latter no particular object is specified (as in the commandment against covetousness). Thus, perhaps, it is necessary to qualify the statement that love is a unity, by saying that it is the *right sort of love* that forms a unity, as indeed does the wrong sort of love, since all impure loves also could be bracketed together under 'the love of self that extends to the contempt of God'.[76]

Commenting on Ps. 118:4, *And I will always keep your law to the end of time and for ever*, Augustine stresses that the fullness of the law, its essential content, is charity:

> The saints, from whose mouth the word of truth will not be taken away, will keep this law, which is to say that Christ's Church itself will keep this law not only until the end of the present age but also in the age beyond... Not that in eternity the precepts of the law (*praecepta legis*) will be proposed to us for our observance, as happens here; no, but we shall keep the very fullness of the law, as I have said, and keep it without any fear of sin (*sed ipsam legis, ut dixi, plenitudinem sine ullo peccandi timore seruabimus*). This is because when we see God more fully we shall love him and our neighbour too, for God will be all in everyone.[77]

In its fullness, the law of charity does not only, as was argued in chapter three, have a double face, it is in fact indivisible. In a fallen world, the law is fragmented[78] into a series of commandments, perhaps so as to make it possible for fallen human beings to keep it, by chopping it up into bite-size chunks, or, perhaps, so as to drive them to grace, because of their very inability to abide by

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[73] Cf. *en. Ps.* 121.1.
[74] *en. Ps.* 118.8.3: *caro concupiscit aduersus spiritum*; cf. Gal. 5:17.
[75] Wis. 6:21.
[76] Cf. *ciu.* 14.28; cf. *en. Ps.* 31.2.5.
[77] *en. Ps.* 118.13.4.
[78] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.26.7: *dissipauerunt legem tuam* – a slightly different, but related point.

all its different parts.[79] The fragmentation of the law could perhaps be compared with the way in which, as discussed in chapter one, language itself has become fragmented in the aftermath of Babel, with communication no longer being possible in a single, transparent utterance, but needing to be divided up into words and syllables. Eschatologically, however, the fragmentation of the law will give way to its essential unity. For the present, although the law has been fragmented, it is still possible to detect the underlying unity between a rightly ordered love of God and neighbour.[80]

An example of this happening in practice comes in Augustine's comments in a homily on the man cured at Bethzatha in John's gospel. Focussing on Jesus's instruction 'take up your bed and walk' (Jn. 5:8), Augustine explains that the man's bed signifies his neighbour, because it is the burden that he is called to bear.[81] Significantly, the man's actions towards his brother are placed chronologically before his actions in relation to God, whom he cannot see, even though, in the order of commanding, love of God comes first:

> The love of God is first in the order of commandment, but the love of neighbour is first in the order of action (*Dei dilectio prior est ordine praecipiendi; proximi autem dilectio prior est ordine faciendi*). For one who would enjoin this love on you in two commandments would not recommend to you the neighbour first and God afterwards, but God first and the neighbour afterwards. But because you do not yet see God, by loving your neighbour you merit seeing him; by loving your neighbour you cleanse your eye for seeing God.[82]

Jesus's instructions do not stop once the man has taken up his bed. Rather, carrying his bed/neighbour, the man is then commanded to walk.[83] When the man walks, he goes to find Jesus, who has formerly been invisible, concealed by the crowd,[84] but eventually reveals himself, as he comes to find the man in the

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[79] Cf. *en. Ps.* 118.25.5: *Lex...ad hoc prodest, ut mittat ad gratiam*; cf. Boulding (2000-4), 5: 463, n. 6.
[80] Cf. Van Bavel (1999). A right love of self, a love of one's body, of one's neighbour and of God make up, in their unity, a properly ordered set of loves.
[81] Cf. Gal. 6:2.
[82] *Io. eu. tr.* 17.8.
[83] *Io. eu. tr.* 17.9: *Tolle ergo grabatum tuum. Sed cum tuleris, noli remanere, ambula.*
[84] Cf. Jn. 5:13.

temple.[85] The man's story mirrors 1 Jn. 4:20: 'if you do not love your brother whom you see, how will you be able to love God whom you do not see?' When the man takes up his bed (i.e., loves his neighbour whom he can see), he finds himself walking towards, and eventually discovering, Jesus (i.e., loving the God whom he was not at first able to see). Although love of God and neighbour are therefore still distinguished in the homily, the former can be seen to lead directly to the latter:

> Where are you taking a trip to, except to the Lord God, to him whom we ought to love with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind?... Therefore carry him with whom you are walking that you may reach him with whom you long to stay.[86]

Love of neighbour and love of God ultimately form a unity, and are inseparable from one another: the one leads to the other.

Moreover, the passage seems also to demonstrate a similar type of synergy between divine and human action to that discussed in chapter four. For, on the one hand, the man does act: he obeys Jesus's commandments: *tolle, ambula*. And yet further reflection enables it to be understood that, in fact, it was God's grace that entirely underlay his ability to do this. By loving his neighbour, he breaks through to love of God, but it is by God's grace that the love of neighbour was made possible in the first place:

> Therefore, love your neighbour and look upon the source in you from which you love your neighbour; there you will see, as far as you can, God. Therefore, begin to love your neighbour.[87]

Thus, as was also argued in the previous chapter, underlying Augustine's instructions and moral exhortations to his congregation is the awareness that their ability to love is entirely founded upon the love of God that has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, there is only one type of (holy) love:

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[85] Cf. Jn. 5:14.

[86] *Io. eu. tr.* 17.9: *Quo iter agis, nisi ad Dominum Deum, ad eum quem diligere debemus ex toto corde, ex tota anima, ex tota mente... Porta ergo eum, cum quo ambulas; ut ad eum pervenias, cum quo manere desideras.*

[87] *Io. eu. tr.* 17.8: *Dilige ergo proximum: et intuere in te unde diligis proximum: ibi videbis, ut poteris, Deum.*

that which the Holy Spirit pours into the hearts of the faithful. This may take different forms, but, because it is the work of the one Spirit, it is essentially one love.

Perhaps the particular contribution that the *Enarrationes* make to this stress on the unity of love may be found in the emphasis that Augustine lays throughout them on the unity of Christ in his head and members. As Van Bavel writes:

> When we love Christ's members, we love Christ himself; when we love Christ we love the Son of God; when we love the Son, we love the Father. Love is the force which draws every individual to an achieved cohesion of the whole: 'the one Christ, loving himself' (*ep. Io.* 20.55).[88]

Because the one Christ includes other human beings within himself, ultimately love of God and love of neighbour cannot be split up. The true unity that members of Christ's body enjoy with one another and with Christ their head ensures identification between Christ and his members. When Christ's members are persecuted, Christ is persecuted: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' (Acts 9:4), even when no one has laid a finger on Christ himself.[89] Similarly, when Christ's members are treated compassionately, Christ also is loved and cared for: 'I was hungry, and you fed me' (Mt. 25:35).[90] Within the *totus Christus*, the unity of all pure loves is therefore particularly strongly evident.

5. Love in action is the aim of preaching

The lector performed the biblical text itself, intoned with power in a solemn and sacred place, rendering homage to its mysteriousness, remoteness and opacity. Then, by the virtuoso performance of the preacher the text was brought down to earth, given a meaning for here and now. The sermon ended as reassuringly as an old-fashioned murder mystery, with the good news the audience already knew confirmed again.[91]

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[88] Van Bavel (1999), 513.
[89] Cf. *en. Ps.* 32.2.2.
[90] Cf. *en. Ps.* 32.2.2.
[91] O'Donnell (2005), 131.

One of the central aims of the preceding chapters has been to emphasise the key role of performance in the *Enarrationes*; that these texts are not simply repositories of theological insight, but are active and living documents, the great majority of them delivered live in the liturgical assembly.[92] Even before Augustine started to preach, many aspects of his classical education would have honed his skills as a performer, used to interacting with an audience. As Brown writes, '[a]bove all, this education would have taught Augustine to express himself. He was encouraged to weep, and to make others weep'.[93] His professional life as a rhetor, interacting with students and friends, and developing ease with the 'open-ended, flexible, theatrical nature' of the dialogue form would further hone such skills.[94]

As was explored in chapter two, Augustine's preaching was not the only show in town, but was in competition for audience ratings with different kinds of performances offered elsewhere, in particular with various types of public entertainment. The incidental details from the basilica in Hippo, some of which were noted in chapter one, such as the congregation's sweating, groaning, answering back, and getting tired, are not incidental to the *Enarrationes*, but take us right to the very heart of the way that this performance was conducted. Indeed, perhaps the wearying nature of the constant cut and thrust of preaching, conversation, debate, dialogue and interaction informs Augustine's insistence, in his monastic *Rule*, on the importance of the monks' listening to the readings during mealtimes without interruption or discussion.[95]

The performance that is really important, however, is not so much that in the basilica, as that which is lived out in the lives of individual Christians in their daily lives. Preaching is itself a performance, but it is also 'hard-wired' to action:

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[92] Cf. McCarthy (2005); O'Donnell (2005), 126-133.
[93] Brown (1967), 37.
[94] Harrison (2006), 8.
[95] Cf. *reg.* 3.1; cf. Van Bavel (1984), 68. Van Bavel comments on this section of the *Rule*, '...we have to take into account here the excitable temperament of the North African. He would not have listened impassively as we might, but had the habit of interrupting the speaker by bursting out in expressions of approval and disapproval'.

...the people flock to church, where they hear how they should live well at the present time so that they may deserve to live in eternal blessedness after this life: where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are preached from on high in the sight of all; and where those who obey may hear it to their profit, and those who do not obey may hear it to their condemnation.[96]

As Finn remarks, in the sermons of Augustine and his contemporaries, the ethical teaching that is implicit in the gospel and rehearsed in the liturgy is applied in the sermon to the conduct of the faithful: '[t]he preacher made explicit what in the gospel text was implicit, and turned description to prescription'.[97] But, prescription for Augustine is never simply prescription. For, whether the focus is the love of the heavenly city, or the need to give alms, or avoidance of the shows, preaching aims to engender, and not just command, its central message of love of God and neighbour.

Ultimately, the two types of performance - that which is carried out in the basilica, and that which takes place in the lives of members of the congregation - are closely linked together. In a criticism of writers such as Borgomeo and Lamirande, McCarthy argues that the *Enarrationes* should not be approached entirely as a work of biblical exegesis, or ecclesiological reflection. For the Psalms, as Augustine interprets them to his congregation, do not simply describe the Church, but perform it, and bring it into being: 'if the psalm is praying, pray yourselves; if it is groaning, you groan too; if it is happy, rejoice; if it is crying out in hope, you hope as well; if it expresses fear, be afraid...'[98] As McCarthy comments, 'Augustine's actual practice of interpreting the psalms with his community…"makes" the Church: it generates the *ecclesia* at a distinct historical moment.'[99] Thus, the very nature of the psalms, as Augustine interprets them, ensures that the preached performance in the basilica is not one that simply happens 'up front'. This is theatre 'in the round', in which spectators are drawn into the action, and become participants, by virtue of their membership of the *totus Christus*. The performance starts when, in the liturgy and the sermon, members of the body of Christ articulate and reflect upon the words of Christ

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[96] *ciu.* 2.28.
[97] Finn (2006), 264.
[98] *en. Ps.* 30.4.1.
[99] McCarthy (2005), 25.

(their words) as they sing them in the psalm, and hear them expounded. And this performance does not finish at the end of the liturgy, but continues as they articulate those same words in their actions after they have left.

6. Love is the ultimate goal of preaching

Perhaps rather an obvious point to make about love is that it cannot be seen. The direction of a person's will, the holy or impure nature of their love, the orientation of their heart - in fact all of the things that, it has been argued, Augustine wants to influence by his preaching - all of these are invisible. As was noted in chapter one, human hearts are fundamentally closed to one another, and the preacher, looking over a congregation, has no way of knowing which are the true and false Christians. In some respects, this makes the role of a bishop, whose role by definition is to oversee,[100] quite impossible: 'we can watch you come in here and go out again, but we cannot even see what you do in your own homes, much less what you think in your hearts'.[101] For even if some tell-tale signs, such as the propensity to attend public entertainments, might be thought to give a strong indication of an individual's inner orientation, nevertheless, to preach on love, to try and encourage it, to direct it towards its proper end is always to be dealing with things that are invisible and intangible.

It is, of course, in the very nature of the Church, as Augustine sees it, that it is impossible to see these things at the present time since, from the beginning, the Church has had a mixture of good and bad among its members.[102] However, the invisibility of people's loves, and the direction of their wills, are perhaps especially significant in the particular circumstances of Augustine's pastoral ministry. As was noted in chapter two, large numbers of people coming to the basilica seem to make Augustine uneasy as much as they encourage him. A burgeoning congregation, full of people with palpably mixed motivations provides a complex and uncertain arena for preaching and pastoral activity. As Dihle writes, the official recognition of Christianity in the Roman Empire brings

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[100] Cf. *ciu.* 19.9.
[101] *en. Ps.* 126.3.
[102] Cf. Bonner (1986), 287-9; Rist (1994), 283-9.

about a situation in which '[c]onduct according to Christian norms ceased to be a distinctive feature'.[103] In a context where it is less possible than ever to see the world divided between those who belong to obvious groupings, the question of the orientation of the will; of what truly motivates individuals, is bound to become more prominent. And, again, it is precisely this which is not open to view.

Thus, there are sharp discontinuities between wheat and chaff, sheep and goats, but these are currently almost invisible. It is impossible to know whether churchgoing behaviour truly betokens belief and willing assent:

> One can enter the Church unwillingly, one can approach the altar unwillingly, one can receive the sacrament unwillingly; no one can believe except willingly. If one believed with the body, it would occur in those unwilling; but one does not believe with the body.[104]

However, while this may be the case in the present, it will certainly not always be so. For the identity of Christ himself, 'God hidden, man manifest',[105] has previously been hidden, but will be eschatologically revealed: 'you will show yourself at the judgement'.[106] And, similarly, the true identity of all people will also then come clearly into view. In the present, physical life takes the lead, and mixes up those with radically different loves, feelings, and desires. In the future, however, it is precisely these hidden aspects of people's lives that will ultimately determine the physical and visible separation that God will make. Commenting on Jn. 5:28-29, *all shall hear his voice and come forth*, Augustine tells his congregation that those things that are most important, but currently hidden, will become evident to all, as wheat and chaff, sheep and goats, are separated:

> ...there will be a division, but not such as there is now. For even now we are separated not by places, but by habits, feelings, desires, faith, hope, love (*Nam et modo separamur non locis, sed moribus, affectibus, desideriis, fide, spe, charitate*). For we live together with wicked persons; but do not all have one life. We are divided in secret (*in occulto separamur*); we are separated in

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[103] Dihle (1982), 130.
[104] *Io. eu. tr.* 26.2: *ergo violentia adhibetur, non voluntas excitatur. Intrare quisquam ecclesiam potest nolens, accedere ad altare potest nolens, accipere Sacramentum potest nolens: credere non potest nisi volens. Si corpore crederetur, fieret in nolentibus.*
[105] *Io. eu. tr.* 21.1: *Deus occultus, homo manifestus.*
[106] *Io. eu. tr.* 21.15: *demonstrabis te in iudicio.*

secret, as the grains on the threshing-floor, not as the grains in the granary... Then there will be an open separation (*tunc aperta erit separatio*), as of habits, so, too, of life; as of wisdom, thus, too, of bodies.[107]

On the last day, then, God will deliver to us that which we love and hope for; what we love now is what we shall possess eternally.[108] The aim of preaching, it has been argued throughout this thesis, is precisely to influence what human beings do love and hope for. Thus, although preaching can and should have an effect in the present, its final goal is eschatological. Love is what will matter in the end. Love defines the preacher's relationship with his congregation, motivates his efforts, provides him with his subject, and, most importantly, love is itself the God-given power that animates his words. And, as preacher and congregation sweat their way through the laborious task of understanding the Psalms, love provides the final end-point of their endeavours:

The tyranny of cupidity or greed being thus overthrown, charity or love reigns supreme with its just laws of loving God for God's sake, and oneself and one's neighbour for God's sake. So this rule will be observed in dealing with figurative expressions, that you should take pains to turn over and over in your mind what you read, until your interpretation of it is led right through to the kingdom of charity.[109]

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[107] *Io. eu. tr.* 19.18.
[108] *en. Ps.* 118.23.8.
[109] *doc. chr.* 3.15.23.

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