

EXERCISES IN GRACE: AUGUSTINE'S *EN. IN PS. 118*¹

With the completion of the 32 *sermones* that make up Augustine's exposition of what he calls the *magnus psalmus*, the 176 verses of his Latin Psalm 118, the Bishop of Hippo finally brought to a conclusion a project that had extended over some three decades.² He undertook a systematic commentary on the psalms during the first days of his public ministry as a priest in Hippo Regius and by the early 420's all but one of the 150 psalms had received his explicit attention. He tells us in the *Prooemium* to his exposition on Psalm 118, one among a number of unique features of this commentary, the reason for the lacuna:

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 (*opusculis nostris*), 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 request 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

¹ This study of Augustine's exposition of *Psalm 118* seeks to highlight the vital connection in Augustine's writings between, if we may be allowed to use modern terminology, theology and spirituality, an insight that is a consistent theme throughout the writings of Fr. Tarcisius van Bavel, O.S.A. It is to him that I dedicate this essay. See also his Aurelius Augustinus, *Commentaar op psalm 118/119*: Vertaald, ingeleid en van aantekeningen voorzien door T.J. van Bavel o.s.a. (Baarn/Antwerpen: Ambok/Kritak, 1996).

² The recent literature on Augustine and the psalms is extensive. In particular, see Michael Fiedrowicz, "*Psalmus Vox Totius Christi*": *Studien zu Augustinus "Enarrationes in Psalmos"*, (Frieburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997); also: "Introduction," by Michael Fiedrowicz, in *Expositions of the Psalms, 1-32*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, translation and notes by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ed., John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park: N.Y.: New City Press, 2000), 13-66; "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," Hildegund Müller, "Philologische Aspekte, 804-837; Michael Fiedrowicz, "Theologische Aspekte," 838-858, *Augustinus-Lexicon*, 2, 5/6, ed. Cornelius Mayer, redaction, Karl Heinz Chelius and Andreas E.J. Grote (Basel: Schwabe & Co. A.G., 2001), esp. 831-832.

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. 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 so 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. Let this be enough by way of prologue. Now let us begin to speak about the psalm itself, after what seemed necessary as an introduction.³

Augustine's comments are both remarkable and intriguing. He leaves no doubt that he considers an exposition of this *psalmus magnus* to be particularly challenging. It has a daunting *obscuritas* which is not even apparent and, even having at last undertaken the exposition, he still remains unsure of his own capability to adequately explain it. As will be seen, Augustine turns to the Apostle Paul to resolve this expository dilemma.

Two significant modern studies signaled a renewed awareness of the importance of this work. In 1962 Charles Kannengieser published his "*Enarratio in Psalmum CXVIII: Science de la revelation et progrès spirituel.*"⁴ In short stead, Anne-Marie La Bonnardière built upon this work in her 1965 study of Augustinian chronology, with a specific chapter dedicated to his exposition of Psalm 118.⁵ Kannengieser noted its irenic tone, the virtual absence of polemics, as well as its erudite approach. This "*commentaire magnifique,*"⁶ he noted, offered a mature and balanced pastoral statement of the life of grace. For its composition, he proposed the years 420-422. Mme. La Bonnardière, with her characteristic careful attention to scriptural

³ *En. Ps. CXVIII, "Prooemium"*; CCL 40, 1664-1665. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation is from *Expositions of the Psalms (Enarrationes in Psalmos)* 99-120, III/19, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, translation and notes by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ed., John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park: N.Y.: New City Press, 2003), 342.

⁴ *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962): 359-381.

⁵ See also, Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. A New Edition with an Epilogue (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 2000), 376.

⁶ Kannengieser, 362.

citations as a basis for determining chronology, proposed a period of some unknown duration after 422.⁷ Both scholars noted that the Pelagian controversy left its mark upon this lengthy psalm exposition. Prolonged and often bitter debates about freedom, sinlessness, concupiscence, asceticism, and a host of other related topics required Augustine to ponder and address such issues. The exposition provided occasion for Augustine to present a constructive rather than polemical explanation of his theology of grace. La Bonnardière also proposed that the commentary embodies Augustine's own pastoral principle, outlined in *De doctrina Christiana* IV.29.62, that less-capable preachers can utilize sermons prepared by others more capable. Augustine, she suggested, took the occasion to offer "model homilies" for preachers, a resource made even more necessary given the Bishop's insistence upon the psalm's elusive *obscuritas*. Kanengieser argued also for a specific "theological" intention. The psalm provides occasion for Augustine to articulate a carefully developed teaching on the nature of supernatural knowledge and the relationship between grace and prayer. I would like to affirm both authors' insights and suggest a further intention. Before doing so, some remarks are in order regarding the exposition's make-up.

An Overview:

Let us wander in the sweet delight of Christ's meadows... (*see ep. 84.1*).

The 32 *sermones* that make up this work, introduced by the already-noted brief explanatory *Prooemium*, offer a lush Augustinian landscape of biblical commentary, theological statement, and spiritual counsel. While the structure of the *expositio* is provided by the 176 verses of Augustine's Latin text of *Psalm 118*, these verses are explained by weaving them into an even richer biblical tapestry drawn from a wide range of scriptural texts. The Bible itself will explain, clarify, and amplify the Psalmist's intention and meaning.⁸ Thus the 176 verses, stated, repeated and paraphrased, are coupled

⁷ Anne-Marie La Bonnardière, *Recherches de Chronologie Augustinienne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1965), 119-141; see also the comments of Pierre-Marie Hombert, *Nouvelles Recherches de Chronologie Augustinienne* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2000) 126, 167, 587.

⁸ This is a constant exegetical principle for Augustine: "In those places where things are used openly we may learn how to interpret them when they appear in obscure places. *doct. chr.* III.26.37, CSEL 80, 101-102. English translation taken from Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. with intro. by D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 101.

with an additional 560+ biblical references.⁹ What is particularly striking about these references is the overwhelming weight given to the writings of St. Paul. Citations from "The Apostle"¹⁰ outweigh all others, over 230. Matthew's gospel is notably present throughout, not surprising for a psalm on the Law, but with some 60+ references trails the Pauline citations considerably. Though the text cannot be simply reduced to being a Pauline commentary on the psalm, the presence of Paul is so consistent and dominant as to allow Paul's voice to be the primary vehicle to transmit the Psalmist's message. The cumulative effect is that this is Psalm 118 *secundum Paulum*—the *obscuritas* and *profunditas* that so impeded Augustine's previous attempts have at last found illumination. Paul teaches Augustine to read this Psalm of the Law as a Psalm of the Law of faith, a faith that always points to grace.¹¹

The law of faith is this: that we believe and pray to be empowered through grace to accomplish what we cannot do by ourselves, lest being ignorant of God's justice and attempting to set up our own, we fail to submit to the justice of God (see Rom 10:3). The justice of God who commands us is expressed in the law of works, but the mercy of him who helps us is exercised through the law of faith.¹²

This is one of a number of key programmatic affirmations throughout the commentary, laying out the foundational theological issues at stake: faith and grace, prayer and knowledge, justice and mercy, works, willing and doing – and how they intersect. Such issues will theologically drive the unfolding of the *expositio*.

As already noted, this work is non-polemical. Its tone is overwhelmingly positive and its style a tempered simplicity. This, however, does not mean that Augustine is ever willing to compromise the exegetical, theological, and spiritual principles forged in the crucible of the Pelagian controversy. Its debates over nature, perfection,

⁹ This is based upon the scriptural index in the *Corpus Christianorum* apparatus, CCL 40, 1664-1776.

¹⁰ Throughout his writings Augustine will often simply refer to St. Paul as "The Apostle."

¹¹ Augustine first uses the expression *lex gratiae* in *Simpl.* I.1.16, CCL 44, 20, l. 294; for a work closer to this exposition see s.152.7, and especially 11, PL 38, 823, 825.

¹² *En. Ps. CXVIII*, X.5, CCL 40, 1694. "Haec est lex fidei, qua credimus et oramus per gratiam nobis donari, ut faciamus quod per nosmetipsos implere non possumus; ne ignorantes Dei iustitiam, et nostram uolentes constituere, iustitiae Dei non simus subiecti. In lege itaque factorum est Dei iubentis iustitia; in lege autem fidei, subuenientis misericordia."

sinlessness, and concupiscence provide an unmistakable backdrop for the exposition: *nisi gratia dei* echoes in a variety of formulations throughout the work, with all its underlying presuppositions and affirmations.¹³ Nonetheless, Augustine finds occasion here to put aside the harsh and uncompromising approach of the polemicist and state his understanding of a theology of grace constructively. Equally notable is a rather consistent erudite approach, a marked contrast with his other psalm commentaries. He cites Greek codices often, complemented by a variety of Latin codices with variant reading. Expressions such as "*ut nonnulli codices habent*" occur repeatedly.¹⁴ One can picture Augustine seated before a vast work table, piled high with Greek and Latin versions of the Psalter. Along with this abiding concern for textual criticism, there is an equally persistent attention to grammar (e.g., gender of nouns, XV,8, 1714); verb tenses, (XIX,2, 1727); cases and parts of speech (XXIX,3, 1764-1765; 9, 1767). Augustine has undertaken a decidedly scholarly and sophisticated approach to the biblical text, presupposing an equal capability for his intended audience. Those he addresses are presumed to be able to delight not only in theological details but also in textual and grammatical intricacies. He is, indeed, writing for intellectually and theologically advanced brethren who are concerned with how to read Scripture correctly yet critically. But to what end? If these are brethren hungry for knowledge of the Scriptures, it is equally apparent, certainly on Augustine's part, that they must link this knowledge to a desire to make progress in holiness and virtue. Augustine's intention throughout is to link carefully both of these aims. If the Pelagians, for Augustine, were onesidedly concerned about good asceticism, Augustine will be concerned about **both** good theology **and** good asceticism, what one might call the "discipline of grace."

Teach me about sweetness, and instruction, and knowledge, for I have believed in your commands (Ps 118.66). He must be asking for these things to be increased and brought to perfection in him; for since he has already acknowledged that *you have provided sweetness for your servant*, how can he now pray, *Teach me about sweetness,*

¹³ See *En. in Ps.* CXVIII, IV.3-4, CCL 40, 1675; VI.5, 1682; XII.3, 1702; XVII.2, 1719; XXVI.1, 1753; 7, 1755; XXVII.9, 1760.

¹⁴ Augustine makes references to other codices some twenty-eight times, e.g. "*unde nonnulli etiam latini codices non habent*," IV.1, 1674; "*sicut quidam codices habent*," XIII.3, 1706; "*sicut alii codices habent*," XV.5, 1713; "*plures enim codices non habent*," XVI.2, 1716; "*nam in quibusdam codicibus et hoc legitur*," XXVII.9, 1760.

unless he is pleading that God's grace may become more and more familiar to him through the sweetness of what is good? After all, the disciples who prayed, *Lord increase our faith*, (Lk 17:5) truly had faith. As long as our life in this world lasts, this request must be the song on those are on their way. The Psalmist continues by asking for instruction, or as several codices have it, *discipline*. But our scriptures customarily use the word discipline as a translation of the Greek παιδεία in contexts where painful instruction is meant. So, for example, we read, *Those whom the Lord loves, he corrects, and he whips every child whom he accepts*. This is the sort of discipline usually envisaged in the Church's writings when the Greek speaks of παιδεία. The word occurs a little further on in the Letter to the Hebrews; *All discipline seems at the time a matter for sadness, not joy; but afterward it yields the peace-giving harvest of righteousness in those who have been trained by it* (Heb 12:6, 11).¹⁵

What this psalm will teach is a Christian *paideia*, the discipline of grace, offering schooling, exercises, even painful instruction not only for theological growth but perhaps even more importantly for spiritual and ascetical growth and progress. True understanding of this Psalm of the Law will enable these brethren to grow in faith and live in grace, provided they are willing to be good students: *Dic nobis, Paule beatissime*, (s.II.2, CCL 40, 670).

Molestissime ferrent fratres mei (En. in Ps. 118, Prooemium)

Augustine's *Prooemium* to this work tells us that he was long under pressure from his brethren, *fratres mei*, to bring to completion his voluminous and protracted commentary on the entire Psalter. Who were these *fratres mei*? Augustine frequently makes reference in his

¹⁵ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XVII.2. CCL 40, 1719.* "Suauitatem, et eruditionem, et scientiam doce me, inquit, quoniam mandatis tuis credidi. Augeri sibi ista poscit et perfici: nam utique qui iam dixerat, Suauitatem fecisti cum seruo tuo; quomodo dicit, Suauitatem doce me, nisi ut ei gratia Dei magis magisque innotescat dulcedine bonitatis? Habebant enim fidem qui dixerunt: Domine, auge nobis fidem. Et quamdiu uiuitur in hoc mundo, proficientium est ista cantatio. Addidit autem, et eruditionem; uel sicut plures codices habent, disciplinam. Sed disciplinam, quam Graeci appellant παιδείαν, ibi Scripturae nostrae ponere consueuerunt, ibi intelligenda est per molestias eruditio; secundum illud: Quem enim diligit Dominus, corripit; flagellat autem omnem filium quem recipit. Haec apud ecclesiasticas litteras dici assolet disciplina, interpretata de graeco, ubi legitur, παιδείαν. Hoc enim uerbum in graeco positum est in Epistola ad Hebraeos, ubi latinus interpret ait: Omnis disciplina ad praesens non gaudii uidetur esse, sed tristitiae; postea autem fructum pacificum his qui per eam certarunt, reddit iustitiae."

Letters to the "*fratres qui mecum sunt in Domino*,"¹⁶ the brethren who are members of his *monasterium clericorum*¹⁷ in Hippo Regius. He surely has them in mind, but perhaps not only them. It is also probable that *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.¹⁸ If so, it is then likely that their insistence came not only from a deep desire to see the project completed, but equally from their own fervent yearning to better know, understand, and live according to the Scriptures. They would have, in fact, learned from Augustine himself that God's word must not only be preached and taught. It must be lived: Augustine fostered such attitudes through his long-standing practice of discussing the scriptures with "the brethren,"¹⁹ and not only in Hippo Regius.²⁰ It may be conjectured that these same brethren would have also been well acquainted with Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, at the date of the exposition still incomplete but, even in its unfinished form, circulating as a valuable guide for understanding, preaching, and living the Scriptures.²¹ Paralleling the precepts proposed and explained by Augustine as necessary guidelines for undertaking the work of interpretation, there is a complementary theme that permeates the work: the life of the expositor is integral to the truth the expositor wishes to communicate. In fact, without an accompanying holiness of life, scripture's truth is compromised by contrary living.²² Interspersed throughout this presentation of exegetical precepts is continuous counsel regarding the expositors way of life:

¹⁶ *Ep.* 63.1, CSEL 34/2, 226; see Paul Monceaux, "La formule '*qui mecum sunt fratres*' dans la correspondance de saint Augustin," in *Mélanges Paul Thomas*, 529-537 (Bruges: Imprimerie Sainte Catherine, 1930).

¹⁷ See ss. 355-356, PL 39, 1568-1581.

¹⁸ "Viel mehr dürfte Augustinus Ps. 118 vor einem kleineren Kreis seiner Kleriker zu deren homiletischer Instruktion ausgelegt..." Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus Vox Totius Christi*, 20.

¹⁹ "Interrogabar a fratribus," *retr.* I.XXVI.1, CCL 57, 74.

²⁰ He locates his "propositions" on Romans in Carthage: "Cum presbyter adhuc essem, contigit ut apud Carthaginem inter nos qui simul eramus, Ad Romanos apostoli epistola legeretur, et quaedam interrogabar a fratribus; quibus cum, sicut poteram responderem..." *retr.* I.XXIII.1, CCL 57, 66-67.

²¹ Regarding this work, its composition, interruption, audience, theology, etc. see "*De doctrina christiana*": *A Classic of Western Culture*, eds. Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

²² *Doct. chr.* IV.29.62, CSEL 80, 168.

When the student of Holy Scripture, having been instructed in this way [a reference to Augustine's previous teaching], begins to approach his text, he should always bear in mind the apostolic saying, "Knowledge puffs up; but charity edifies" (1 Cor 8:1).²³

Augustine not only points out here that exegesis must be accompanied by wisdom and humility,²⁴ but likewise insists upon the expositor's need for faith, hope, and love,²⁵ "good endeavor and good habits,"²⁶ and the practice of a host of other evangelical virtues:

... for the life of the speaker (*uita docentis*) has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.²⁷

A persistent theme throughout the *De doctrina christiana* is that the one who teaches to others what he himself has learned from the scriptures can never rest content with knowledge of languages, grammatical and textual expertise, and all the other important technical learnings proposed by Augustine as integral to the act of exposition. First and foremost he must live the truth he finds in the Scriptures. In a striking way his exposition of Psalm 118 provides a classic model for this Augustinian insistence. Not only does it provide a substantive theological understanding of the "law of grace," but just as importantly it offers necessary spiritual guidance and direction in order to live that same law of grace.

The Pelagian controversy, one may propose, taught Augustine that sound theology and a complementary sound ascetical practice are inseparable. The admirable Pelagian concern for holiness of life among God's people was, in Augustine's estimation, fatally compromised by their theological misunderstanding (at a certain point willful!) of the nature of that holiness. Perhaps the distinctive approach of Pelagius that so sets him at odds with Augustine is no better cap-sulized than in his remarks to the young virgin Demetrias:

There is, I maintain, a sort of *natural sanctity* (emphasis added) in our minds which, presiding as it were in the mind's citadel, administers judgment equally on the evil and the good and, just as it favours honourable and upright actions, so too condemns wrong deeds and, on the evidence of conscience, distinguishes the one side from the other

²³ Ibid., II.41.62, CSEL 80, 76-77; see III.1.1, CSEL 80, 79; IV.27.59, CSEL 80, 166.

²⁴ See esp. ibid. II.42.63, CSEL 80, 78.

²⁵ Ibid., I.39.43-40.44, CSEL 80, 32-33.

²⁶ Ibid., I.10.10, CSEL 80, 13. *On Christian Doctrine*, p. 13.

²⁷ Ibid., IV.27.59, CSEL 80, 165-166.

by a kind of inner law; nor, in fine, does it seek to deceive by any display of cleverness or of counterfeit brilliance in argument but either denounces or defends us by our thoughts themselves, surely the most reliable and incorruptible of witnesses.²⁸

It is precisely such spiritual dissonance between what might be anachronistically called theology and spirituality that the exposition seeks to avoid; in fact, it offers a radically differing view of the nature of holiness, the powers of the mind, and its outcome in wrongdoing or good deeds:

If the saints' refusal to declare themselves sinless is no more than a precaution against arrogance rather than an admission of the truth, why do they confess their sins in the hope of deserving forgiveness and cleansing? Surely confession is not made merely in order to avoid pretentiousness? How will a real cleansing from sins be earned by a confession of sins that is hollow? The hauteur of the proud is self-deceiving. In the hearing of other people it feigns humility by calling itself sinful, while in its impious conceit it declares itself sinless in its own heart. But let it fall silent now and wither away like grass. People who claim to be without sin deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them; but when they make their claim in the hearing of others they mislead not only themselves but others too, through the perversity of their unhealthy teaching. Even if they say it only within their own hearts they lead themselves astray there, for then there is no truth within them. Being self-deceived within, they lose the light of truth from their hearts.²⁹

²⁸ *Epistola XVII Pelagii ad Demetriadem*, IV, PL XXXIII, 1101. "Est enim, inquam, in animis nostris naturalis quaedam, ut ita dixerim, sanctitas, quae uelut in arce animi praesidens, exercet mali bonique iudicium; et ut honestis rectisque actibus fauet, ita sinistra opera condemnat, atque ad conscientiae testimonium diuersas partes domestica quadam lege diiudicat: nec ullo prorsus ingenio, aut fucato aliquo argumentorum colore decipit; ipsis nos cogitationibus, fidelissimis et integerrimis sane testibus, aut arguit, aut defendit." English translation, B R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, vol. II (Woodbridge, U.K.: The Boydell Press, 1998), 40.

²⁹ *En. Ps. CVIII*, II.2, CCL 40, 1669. "Si enim propter arrogantiam deuitandam, non propter ueritatem fatendam, non dicunt sancti se non habere peccatum; quid est quod confitentur, ut remissionem mundationemque mereantur? An et hoc fit, ut arrogantia deuitetur? Quomodo ergo impetrabitur peccatorum uera mundatio, quorum est falsa confessio? Conticescat igitur et arescat elatio fenea superbiorum, se ipsa seducens, quae in auribus hominum simulata humilitate dicit se habere peccatum, in corde autem suo impia elatione dicit se non habere peccatum. Qui enim hoc dicunt, seipsos seducunt, et ueritas in eis non est. Sed quando in auribus hominum hoc dicunt, non tantum seipsos, sed alios quoque doctrinae insanae peruersitate seducunt: cum uero id in corde suo dicunt, illic seipsos seducunt, illic ueritas in eis non est; ac per hoc seipsos in corde suo seducunt, et in suo corde ueritatis lumen amittunt."

Christian holiness and theological orthodoxy are inseparable, a persistent theme throughout the patristic era.

These observations support the consensus of modern scholarship that dates this work to the years immediately following 422. Augustine had just completed the six books of the *Contra Iulianum* and had every reason to believe that the acrimonious and wearisome Pelagian debates were behind him. This, to be sure, did not mean that he was prepared to surrender or even compromise the foundational issues, principles, and arguments of the debates: "*audacia de libero arbitrio contra gratiam confidentis*," s.XIX.7, CCL 40, 1729). Rather, it seems to have provided him with an opportunity to place these hard-fought principles into a more unified and constructive framework. He was, after all, speaking to *fratres mei*, many like him fellow *dispensatores uerbi et sacramenti*,³⁰ sharing with him a deep commitment to an itinerary of truth and holiness. Their task was not only to preach God's way, but to traverse that very way themselves. It was imperative that the foundational charge laid against the Pelagians, self-reliance that was nothing less than pride, not infect their own striving for holiness.

The apostle Paul enjoins the same fear and trembling on his faithful disciples: *Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, inspiring both will and work, for his own good purpose* (Phil 2:12-13). The ways of the righteous are thus open to the Lord's gaze so that he may guide their steps, for theirs are the ways of which the Book of Proverbs says, *The ways on the right are known to the Lord, but those on the left are crooked* (Prv 4:37). We are meant to understand that these perverse ways are unknown to the Lord in the sense that he will say to certain crooked persons, *I never knew you* (Mt 7:23). But Proverbs goes on to show the purpose of the Lord's knowing the ways of the just at his right hand, for immediately it adds, *He will direct your steps, and further your journey in peace* (Prv 4:27). There we have the reason why the psalmist says, *I have kept your commandments and your testimonies*. If we were to ask him how he did it, he would reply, *All my ways are open to your scrutiny, O Lord*.³¹

The journey of holiness is one guided, directed, and furthered by the Lord. It is, in short, the way of grace.

³⁰ See s.301A.1, MA 1, 81, PL 46, 874.

³¹ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXXI.8*, CCL 40, 1773. "Nam hunc timorem et tremorem apostolus etiam Paulus imponit eis quibus dicit, Cum timore et tremore uestram ipsorum salutem operamini: et cur hoc dixerit aperiens, Deus est enim, inquit, qui operatur in uobis et uelle et operari, pro bona uoluntate. Ad hoc sunt ergo in conspectu Domini uiuae iustorum, ut dirigat gressus eorum, quoniam ipsae sunt uiuae de quibus scriptum est in Prouerbiis, *Vias autem quae a dextris sunt, nouit Dominus: peruersae autem sunt, inquit, quae a sinistris*: ut intelligeremus quod eas non nouerit Dominus,

All is Grace

The central affirmation that holds together the entire exposition is thus one of grace, indeed, one might say, a theology **and** a spirituality of grace. The doctrine of grace demands not just intellectual assent but must be transformed into a way of life.³² Throughout the exposition such insistence often takes the form of concise yet dense maxims that affirm the theological principle of grace but can equally be spiritually employed as easily remembered precepts for living.

fides non immemor gratiae (s.IV.2, CCL 40, 1674)

per fidem ad... gratiam (see s.XXVI.7, CCL 40, 1755)

lex enim ad hoc prodest, ut mittat ad gratiam (s.XXV.5, CCL 40, 1750)

gratiae filius, homo nouus, cantator noui cantici, heres testamenti noui (s.V.3, CCL 40, 1677)

nisi gratia dei (s.IV.3, CCL 40, 1675; see VI.5, CCL 40, 1682; XII.3 CCL 40, 1702; XXVI.7, CCL 40, 1755; XXVII. 9, CCL 40, 1760)
ut secundum gratiam firma sit promissio omni semini (s.X.3, CCL 40, 1793)

sed totum dei gratiae retribuamus (s.XIII.1, CCL 40, 1705)

ut iustificentur gratis per gratiam ipsius (s.XXII.2, CCL 40, 1737)

iustificat gratis per gratiam ipsius (s.XXV.2, CCL 40, 1748)

opus iustitiae... opus gratiae (s.XXVI.1, CCL 40, 1753)

It may be suggested that Augustine envisioned them in a fashion similar to the "arrow prayers" he mentions in his Letter to Proba:

The brothers in Egypt are said to say frequent prayers, but very brief ones that are tossed off as if in a rush, so that a vigilant and keen intention, which is very necessary for one who prays, may not fade away and grow dull over longer periods.³³

propter quod peruersis dicturus est, Non noui uos. Porro ut ostenderet quo fructu uias quae a dextris sunt, id est iustorum, nouerit Dominus, continuo subiecit: Ipse enim rectos faciet gressus tuos, et itinera tua in pace producet. Ecce quare ait etiam iste, Custodiui mandata tua et testimonia tua. Et uelut quaereremus hoc unde potuerit: Quia omnes, inquit, uiae meae in conspectu tuo, Domine."

³² See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Edited with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

³³ *Ep.* 130.10.20, CSEL 44, 62-63. "Dicuntur fratres in aegypto crebras quidem habere orationes sed eas tamen breuissimas et raptim quodam modo iaculatas, ne illa uigilanter erecta, quae oranti plurimum necessaria est, per productiores moras euanescat atque hebetetur intentio." St. Augustine, *Letters 100 – 155. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Translation and notes by Roland Teske, S.J., ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2003), 193.

These "darts of grace" can be employed to teach grace as well as to enkindle the "intention of grace," ever subject to distraction and inattention.

Underlying each axiom is a substantive theological account, more often than not Pauline in origin, affirming that the *lex Dei* that is the focus of this psalm is none other than the *lex gratiae*:³⁴ "*gratia itaque Dei nobis praecipue commendatur.*"³⁵ And even this awareness is a gift of grace: *nemo comprehendit, nisi a Domino acceperit intellectum.*³⁶ And what is ever meant to be understood is that this is not simply "grace" but always *gratia Christi*. He comments upon v. 121 of the Psalm: "*Feci iudicium et iustitiam; ne tradas me nocentibus me.*"

[F]or who creates justice in human beings? He only, who justifies the godless; that is to say, he who by his grace turns the impious into the just (see Rom 4:5). Hence the apostle says, *They are justified freely by his grace* (Rom 3:24). We conclude, therefore, that as the work of grace is to create justice in just persons, so will those just persons act justly, manifesting the work of the justice they have within them.³⁷

Ex impio iustum is the work of the grace of Christ; this is the *opus Christi*.³⁸

Once again it is important to emphasize that the Pelagian controversy convinced Augustine of the necessity to insist that an affirmation of the *ueritas gratiae* (see s.XIX.3, CCL 40, 1727) demands a concomitant willingness to live accordingly: the *ueritas gratiae* demands a *conuersatio gratiae*.³⁹ Without a doubt, the initial concerns of Pelagius seemed to have been precisely one of life-style: his perception that the Christian life was increasingly compromised by spiritual sloth and mediocrity. Augustine's heated, bitter, and prolonged

³⁴ S.152.11, PL 38, 825. "Alia ergo lex, ut dicere coeperam, tibi ostendat peccatum, alia tollat: ostendat peccatum lex litterae, tollat peccatum lex gratiae."

³⁵ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, XI.4, CCL 40, 1697.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, XXVI.1, CCL 40, 1753. "Quis enim facit in homine iustitiam, nisi qui iustificat impium, hoc est, per gratiam suam ex impio facit iustum? Unde ait Apostolus: *Iustificati gratis per gratiam ipsius*. Facit ergo iustitiam, id est, opus iustitiae, qui habet in se iustitiam, id est opus gratiae."

³⁸ See *Io. Eu. tr. LXX.2*, CCL 36, 508: "In hoc opere faciamus opera christi, quia et ipsum credere in Christum, opus est Christi."

³⁹ Perhaps no more clearly highlighted than in the *Rule of Saint Augustine (Praeceptum)* VIII.1: "de bona **conuersatione** flagrantes, non sicut serui sub lege, sed sicut liberi **sub gratia** constituti." *Praeceptum*, Édition Critique, in L. Verheijen, *La Règle de saint Augustin*, I, *Tradition manuscrite* (Paris: Revue des Études Augustiniennes, 1967), 437, ll. 237-239.

debates with his Pelagian opponents centered around issues of “living”: free will, sinlessness, perfection, desire, and a host of other issues. Augustine found himself forced to walk a delicate line between grace and asceticism. How affirm the former without negating the latter? For sure, these disputes only further convinced Augustine that the scars of *ignorantia* and *infirmetas* will never be fully healed “*cum in carne adhuc uiueres*” (s.II.2, CCL 40, 1670). The living of the life of the grace of Christ will always be marked by imperfection. Augustine does indeed signal a striking departure from a long-standing ascetical tradition that affirmed heroic holiness as its intention and goal. It is precisely why Augustine turns to the authority of the apostle Paul in this regard. Could anyone accuse Paul of sloth or mediocrity?

Tell us, then, most blessed Paul: did you walk in the ways of the Lord while you still lived in the flesh?” “Of course I did,” he answers... Tell us, please apostle: during your life in the flesh, when you were walking the Lord’s ways, did you sin at all, or were you without sin? Let us listen now... —*dic nobis, Paule beatissime, utrum ambulaueris in uis Domini cum in carne adhuc uiueres?... dic, obsecro, o apostole, quando adhuc in carne uiuens in uis Domini ambulabas; habebas peccatum, an sine peccato eras...*⁴⁰

It is Augustine’s reliance upon the authority of the apostle that will make these “exercises in grace” intensely Pauline in their orientation. The apostle himself will teach as well as model what it means to walk in the way of the Lord, the way set forth throughout this *magnus psalmus*: “*Vide illum Saulum, postea Paulum ...*” (s.VII.2, CCL 40, 1683). It is not only necessary to listen to Paul, one must look at the example of Paul’s own life and journey to discover and learn what is the Christian journey of holiness.

Walking the Way of the Lord.

Augustine’s expansive exposition offers a comprehensive, dynamic, and demanding vision of the Christian life: one where grace both prompts and supports a life marked by love and humility, intelligence and service; one that provides a model that does justice to the redemption wrought by Christ. The very length of the psalm allows for breadth, depth, and repetition: each verse providing occasion for exploring or reiterating still another aspect of the life according to the law of grace. A sampling of the most consistently emphasized themes

⁴⁰ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, II.2, CCL 1670.

will demonstrate the contours of this distinctively Augustinian vision of the Christian life.

Grace's grammar:

As a professional rhetor, with an intense interest in both the nature and use of language, Augustine pays close attention to the Latin text of *Psalm* 118. When it comes to Scripture, God's word, grammar and vocabulary take on theological significance, enabling Augustine to find, in the very make-up of the text, firm support for insisting that its message of grace. For example he pays close attention to the, at first glance, insignificant conjunctions and adverbs such as *ne*, *ut*, and *utinam*. He will find here what we may call "the grammar of grace." He comments on v. 5 of the Psalm: "*Utinam dirigantur uiae meae ad custodiendas iustificationes tuas.*"

When you hear the phrase, "O that..! (*utinam*)" you must recognize the accents of someone who is yearning. And when you hear this voice of longing and hope, lay aside your overbearing presumption, for no one expresses longing if he is so free to choose that he can bring about the desired outcome with no help from anyone else. If a man or woman is longing for something to happen, something which God has commanded, we must infer that it is absolutely necessary to pray to God, that he may grant what he has himself enjoined.⁴¹

He continues by noting that if it were only a question of "*solis nostrae uoluntatis uiribus impleantur*" we would not find the "*utinam*," a grammatical buttress for the theological principle: "*nisi adiuet tua gratia.*" In commenting on v. 121, "*Feci iudicium et iustitiam; ne tradas me nocentibus me,*" we find another example of this grammar of grace:

When the psalmist prays not to be delivered (*ne tradatur*) by the Lord to his adversaries, what is he asking if not what we ask in prayer when we say, *Lead us not into temptation (ne nos inferas in tentationem)* (Mt 6:3). It is this adversary that Paul has in mind when he says, *I was afraid that the tempter might have tempted you (ne forte*

⁴¹ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, IV.2, CCL 40, 1674. "Ubi audis *utinam* uocem optantis agnosce; at agnita uoce optantis, depone superbiam praesumentis. Quis enim se dicat optare quod sic habet in arbitrii potestate, ut nullo indigens adiumento id possit efficere? Ergo si optat homo quod praecipit Deus; ut det ipse quod praecipit, rogandus est Deus." The echoes here with *conf. X.29.40*, CCL 27, 176, seem obvious, a text that Pelagius found unpalatable, see *perseu.* 20.53, PL 45, 1026.

tentauerit uos qui tentat) (1 Th 3:5). God hands over to the tempter anyone whom he himself abandons. The tempter cannot deceive a person whom God does not abandon; to human beauty in someone like that, God in his kindly will adds strength.⁴²

Augustine suggests that the very syntax of the text affirms grace, reinforcing the inspired text's meaning, evident in the clear link between the "*ne*" of the Psalm and the "*ne*" of the Lord's Prayer, both in turn connecting with the Apostle's affirmation to the Thessalonians. Augustine continues by linking the mentioned "adversary" to the struggle with "*concupiscentia*":

When, therefore, a person has crucified the flesh through chaste fear of God, is corrupted by no carnal allurements, practices judgment, and deals justly, such a one should pray not to be delivered to his adversaries (*ne aduersantibus tradatur*), lest through fear of suffering a horrible fate (*ne timendo*) he yield to the persecutors and commit horrible deeds instead. Pray he must, because God who grants him the victory over concupiscence, so that he is not dragged away by sensuality (*ne uoluptate pertrahatur*), grants him also strong, steadfast endurance, so that he is not broken by pain (*ne dolore frangatur*).⁴³

"*Ut*" functions in the same way. V. 60, "*Paratus sum et non sum turbatus, ut custodiam mandata tua*," is preceded by "*denique hoc impetrato gratiae beneficio*." This is even clearer in a comment on v. 80: "*Fiat cor meum immaculatum in iustificationibus tuis, ut non confundar*."

Here Christ speaks once more in the voice of his body, his holy people, and prays that his heart – the heart of his members, that is – may be free from stain. This can come about only through God's justifying work, not through any efforts of their own, and so cleanness of heart is prayed for, not presumed. The phrase, *that I may not be put to shame*, is reminiscent of words we met in the opening lines of this psalm, *O that my ways may be directed toward observing your ways of justice! Then I shall not be put to shame, if I look carefully into all*

⁴² *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXVI.2*, CCL 40, 1753-1754. "Orans itaque *ne* tradatur a Domino aduersantibus sibi, quid orat, nisi quod oramus cum dicimus, *Ne* nos inferas in tentationem? Aduersarius est enim de quo dicit Apostolus, *Ne* forte tentauerit uos qui tentat. Ei tradit Deus quem deserit. Eum quippe ille non decipit, quem iste non deserit, in uoluntate sua praestans decori hominis uirtutem..."

⁴³ *Ibid.* "Quisquis igitur a timore Dei casto crucifixas habet carnes suas, et nulla carnali corruptus illecebra facit iudicium opusque iustitiae, orare debet *ne* aduersantibus tradatur; id est, *ne* timendo perpeti mala, ad facienda mala persequentibus cedat. A quo enim accipit uictoriam concupiscentiae, *ne* uoluptate pertrahatur; ab illo etiam robur patientiae, *ne* dolore frangatur..."

your statutes. But there the expression used was *O that ...!* (*utinam*) which indicates a wish; here we have instead the language of prayer, *Let my heart be unsullied* (*fiat cor meum immaculatum*). However, there is no disagreement between them, and neither displays the arrogance of free will trusting to itself in opposition to grace. In the earlier verse the psalmist said *I shall not be put to shame* (*tunc non confundar*), and now he prays that *I may not be put to shame* (*ut non confundar*). The heart of Christ's members, the heart of his body, is rendered immaculate by the grace of God that flows to it through its head, that is, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Grace flows to Christ's members through the laver of rebirth, in which all our past sins have been destroyed... In all these ways, through the new birth given to us, through help afforded to us in our struggle, and through prayer poured out, our heart is purified from its pollution, so that we may not be put to shame.⁴⁴

This attention to grammar is not meant to be taken as an excursion into erudition. Rather, it confirms Augustine's insistence that even the Psalm's syntax affirms the law of grace.

Grace's prayer:

At the outset of *sermo* XIV Augustine comments:

This man of God (*homo Dei*) has hitherto been begging for the help of God's grace, as he constantly prayed, *In your justice give me life; and let your mercy come upon me, O Lord.*⁴⁵

Augustine recalls vv. 41-42 of *Psalm* 118, observing in the psalmist's declaration uncontested evidence of the need to pray for grace. Prayer is a persistent theme throughout the exposition, as already

⁴⁴ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XIX.7, CCL 40, 1729.* "Redit ad uocem corporis sui, sancti scilicet populi sui, et iam immaculatum fieri cor suum precatur, hoc est cor membrorum suorum; in iustificationibus Dei, non in uiribus eorum: poposcit enim hoc, non praesumpsit. Quod autem addidit, *Ut non confundar*; tale aliquid et in primis huius psalmi uersibus inuenitur, ubi dixit, *Utinam dirigantur uiae meae ad custodiendas iustificationes tuas: tunc non confundar, cum inspicio in omnia mandata tua.* Quod ibi, quia dixit, *Utinam*, uno uerbo significauit optantis; hoc isto loco apertioribus uerbis expressit orantis, dicendo, *Fiat cor meum immaculatum: ut nec in illa, nec in ista sententia, quae utraque una est, inueniatur audacia de libero arbitrio contra gratiam confidentis...* Ita donata nobis regeneratione, adiuta conflictione, fusa precatione, fit cor nostrum immaculatum, *ut non confundamur...*"

⁴⁵ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XIV.1, CCL 40, 1707.* "Petebat enim homo Dei superius adiutorium gratiae Dei, cum dicebat, *In tua iustitia uiuifica me; et ueniat super me misericordia tua, Domine.*"

noted by Kannengieser.⁴⁶ Augustine is firm to insist, however, that the psalmist's prayer is also theological statement: *Quid igitur orat, nisi ut praecepta quae Deus imponit iubendo, impleri faciat adiuuando?* (s.XXVII.6, CCL 40, 1759); *orat ut sibi lex a Domino ponatur* (s.XI.1, CCL 40, 1696); *orat ut per spiritum faciat quod per litteram sciebat* (ibid. 4, CCL 40, 1698); *orat ut uelit* (ibid.6, CCL 40, 1698); *ecce orat, ut adiuuetur ad custodienda uerba dei* (s.V.3, CCL 40, 1678); *orat... ut concupiscentia qua concupiscitur aduersus spiritum, magis magisque minuatur* (s.X.2, CCL 40, 1693); *hoc itaque orat, ut in ipsa uoluntate proficiat* (s.XI.6, CCL 40, 1698); *orat ut non sit eius uita sub sole, ubi omnia uanitas; sed in illo sit, in quo se uiuificari petit* (s.XII.1, CCL 40, 1700), etc. The prayer for grace covers all aspects of a holy life, from virtuous living to interior peace. At various points throughout the exposition it also prompts Augustine to return to a scriptural text that is highlighted all throughout his writings, namely Mt. 7:7, on asking, seeking, and knocking. Here it becomes a telling affirmation regarding the life of grace. He comments upon v. 131: "*Os meum aperui, et attraxi spiritum, quoniam mandata tua desiderabam.*"

What else was he longing for, if not to observe God's commandments? But a weak person has no means of performing mighty feats, nor could a little one achieve great things; so he opened his mouth to confess that he could not do it of himself, and he drew in the Breath that would empower him to do it. He opened his mouth **to ask, seek, and knock**; he thirsted, and he drank in the good Spirit, through whom he would be able to do what he could not do unaided: observe the command that was holy, and just, and good. If we, evil as we are, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give his good Spirit to those who ask him? It is not those impelled by their own spirit, but all those moved by the Spirit of God, who are children of God. This does not mean they do nothing but that they are moved by the good Spirit in what they do (*a bono aguntur ut agant [boni]*), for otherwise they might be active indeed but do nothing good. The more generously the good Spirit is bestowed on someone by the Father, the more he or she becomes a good son or daughter of God.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Kannengieser, 376-377.

⁴⁷ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXVII.4*, CCL 40, 1758. "*Quid desiderabat, nisi facere mandata diuina? Sed non erat unde faceret infirmus fortia, paruulus magna: aperuit os, confitens quod per se ipse non faceret; et attraxit unde faceret: aperuit os **petendo, quaerendo, pulsando**; et sitiens hausit spiritum bonum, unde faceret, quod per seipsum non poterat, mandatum sanctum et iustum et bonum. Si enim nos cum simus mali, nouimus bona data dare filiis nostris; quanto magis Pater noster de coelo dat*

The Christian's life of grace must be a continuous prayer of *petendo*, *quaerendo*, *pulsando*, emblematic of a divine-human spiritual and moral intimacy: *a bono aguntur ut agant*.

[God] makes us ask for the one we most desire to receive; he makes us seek the one we long to find; he makes us knock at the door of him into whose presence we strive to come. This is what the apostle is teaching us when he says that we cry out, *Abba! Father!* (Rom 8:15) in the Holy Spirit. Again in another place he says, *God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying Abba! Father!* (Gal 4:6). How can we be said to cry out if the Spirit himself is crying out in us? Surely because he has been making us cry out, ever since he first began to dwell in us. Once we have received him he works in us, empowering us to go on demanding more, so that by asking, seeking, knocking, we may receive him in ever greater plenitude. All those who are impelled by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God, whether their prayer arises from a good life or begs that a good life may be granted to them (cf. Rom 8:14).⁴⁸

If we must pray for grace, nonetheless, the very prayer for grace is itself a grace! *Ipse nos facit petere*. Once again Augustine affirms a mysterious intimacy that allows for both divine and human agency.

Love and grace:

If Paul provided Augustine with the exegetical-theological resources necessary to bring to light the psalm's *obscuritas*, one Pauline text that served him well was Rom 5:5 with its declaration of God's love poured forth into human hearts by the Holy Spirit. In this *psalmus legis* it ought to come as no surprise that Augustine will be guided by the *lex caritatis*. It is the most used Pauline text (some 11 times) in the exposition and by this time in Augustine's

spiritum bonum petentibus eum? Non enim qui spiritu suo agunt, sed quotquot spiritu Dei aguntur, hi filii sunt Dei: non quia ipsi nihil agunt; sed ne nihil boni agant, a bono aguntur ut agant. Nam tanto magis efficitur quisque filius bonus, quanto largius ei datur a Patre spiritus bonus."

⁴⁸ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XIV.2, CCL 40, 1709*. "Ac per hoc ipse nos facit petere, quem desideramus accipere; ipse nos facit quaerere, quem cupimus inuenire; ipse nos facit pulsare, ad quem nitimur peruenire. Hoc docet Apostolus, qui cum dicat in spiritu sancto nos clamare, *Abba, Pater*; rursus alio loco dicit, *Dedit Deus spiritum Filii sui in corda nostra clamantem, Abba, Pater*. Quomodo nos clamamus, si ipse clamat in nobis, nisi quia clamare nos fecit, dum habitare coepit in nobis? Etiam hoc itaque agit acceptus, ut largius accipiendus petendo, quaerendo, pulsando, poscatur. Siue enim ut uita bona petatur, siue ut bene uiuatur; quotquot spiritu Dei aguntur, hi filii sunt Dei."

own theological development has become a key affirmation of the nature and functioning of the grace of Christ.⁴⁹ He comments on v. 127: "*Ideo dilexi mandata tua super aurum et topazion.*"

The effect of grace is that God's commandments, which could not possibly be implemented by fear, are fulfilled by love; for through grace *the charity of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given us* (Rom 5:5). This is why the Lord himself declared, *I came not to annul the law, but to bring it to fullness* (Mt 5:17); and the apostle concurred: *The fullness of the law is love* (Rom 13:10).⁵⁰

Augustine turns to Paul to establish an intimate operational link between *gratia* and *caritas*, a connection made even stronger by the Apostle's linking the pair to faith: "*fides quae per dilectionem operatur*" (Gal 5:6).⁵¹ These bonds taken on programmatic status for understanding the true nature and intent of God's law:

The law he means is the law of faith (see Rom 3:27); not an idle faith, but the faith that is active through love (see Gal 5:6). In response to such faith believers receive the grace that strengthens them in temporal troubles, so that they do not perish in the humiliation attendant on our mortality.⁵²

Love resolves what may be perceived as an apparent, inevitable, and even irreconcilable conflict between freedom and obedience, grace and works, law and faith. This faith which works through love is always a "*fides non immemor gratiae*" (s.IV.2, CCL 40, 1674). It is this same love which guarantees that the *lex fidei* does not become an *inanis fidei*.⁵³ Commenting upon v. 119: "*Propterea dilexi testimonia tua, quae sunt in lege tua,*" Augustine delicately holds in harmony grace, love, and the law:

But that is why *I have loved your testimonies*, the testimonies enshrined in your law, which tell of your grace, bidding me look in

⁴⁹ See A.-M. La Bonnardière, "Le verset paulinien Rom. 5,5 dans l'oeuvre de s. Augustin," in *AugM* (1954), 657-665.

⁵⁰ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXVI.8*, CCL 40, 1756. "Id agit gratia, ut dilectione impleantur mandata Dei, quae timore non poterant. Gratia quippe Dei diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis. Propter quod et ipse Dominus dicit, Non ueni legem soluere, sed implere; et idem Apostolus, Plenitudo legis caritas."

⁵¹ Its importance also noted by Kannegieser, 376-377.

⁵² *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXI.4*, CCL 40, 1734. "Ista lex fidei est; non inanis fidei, sed quae per dilectionem operatur. Per hanc impetratur gratia, quae fortes facit in tribulatione temporali, ne pereant in humilitate mortali."

⁵³ *Ibid.*

myself for no righteousness of my own but only yours. The function of law is to send us to grace. Not only does law bear witness to the justice of God to be revealed outside the law; it also turns those who know the law into law-breakers, to such a point that the letter is death-dealing (see 2 Cor 3:6). In either case, the fear it arouses forces us to flee to the life-giving Spirit, through whom every kind of sin is blotted out and charity is breathed into us, that we may act aright. *Therefore*, says the psalmist, *I have loved your testimonies*.⁵⁴

Augustine portrays the grace of love as both transformative and performative. It overcomes fear, it inspires goodly deeds.

Grace's knowledge:

Augustine seems well aware that the theology of grace he is explaining provocatively challenges human understanding. On the surface, it might seem that the Pelagian account of human autonomy and responsibility is much more "reasonable." A frequent charge of Augustine's Pelagian opponents was precisely that this Augustinian view of the divine-human relationship goes against human reason.⁵⁵ Augustine provocatively responds to the charge by insisting that grace is necessary for a correct understanding of grace. He comments on v. 66, "*Mandatis tuis credidi*":

What can it mean, then, to say, *I have believed in your commands*? Surely it means, "I have believed that it was you who so commanded us, not some mere mortal, even though your commands are passed on through human beings to other human beings." And since I have believed that these are your commandments, let the faith by which I believe it win from you the grace I need to do what you have commanded. If someone who is no more than human were to lay those commands on me from outside, would he also help me from within to do what he ordered? Of course not. Do you, then, teach me sweetness by inspiring charity, teach me discipline by granting me patience, and

⁵⁴ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXV.5, CCL 40, 1750*. "Propterea dilexi testimonia tua, quae sunt in lege tua, de gratia tua; ut non sit in me iustitia mea, sed tua. Lex enim ad hoc prodest, ut mittat ad gratiam. Non solum enim quod attestatur manifestandae iustitiae Dei, quae sine lege est; uerum etiam hoc ipso quod praeuaricantes facit, ita ut etiam littera occidat; ad uiuificantem spiritum confugere timore compellit, per quem peccatorum deleatur uniuersitas, et recte factorum caritas inspiretur: Propterea, inquit, *dilexi testimonia tua*."

⁵⁵ See for example how Augustine emphasizes *rationabilis* when arguing against Julian, *c. Iul. I.7.33, PL 44, 664*.

teach me knowledge by illuminating my intelligence, *because I have believed in your commands*.⁵⁶

"Teach me knowledge by illuminating my intelligence": we have here another action of grace, imparting knowledge and understanding to the mind. This knowledge and understanding, itself a grace, has as its content grace. Augustine finds even greater support for such an affirmation in the "*Da mihi intellectum, et scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde meo*" of v. 34: He will repeat it often in the course of the exposition to affirm that the understanding of grace is itself a grace to be sought:

Give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies. We must never cease to offer this prayer, for it is not enough to have received understanding once and learned God's testimonies once; we need to keep on receiving it all the time and to be drinking continually from the fountain of eternal light. As a person grows in understanding, so do God's testimonies become known more and more.⁵⁷

This *intellectum gratiae* is not only a theoretical understanding but a concomitant commitment to growth and progress: Commenting still another time upon *da mihi intellectum*, he considers what is meant by such understanding:

Is not understanding a quality inherent in human nature, distinguishing us from the beasts? Or is human nature so badly deformed by sin that even its reason needs reformation? Yes, perhaps it does, for the apostle says to all who are reborn, *Be renewed spiritually in your minds* (Eph 4:23), and obviously understanding is exercised through the mind. Again he says, *Allow yourselves to be reformed by the renewal of your minds* (Rom 4:12). But when he speaks of those who have no share in the new birth, he warns, *This I must say, and adjure you in the Lord: Walk no more now as the pagans walk. Their minds are empty; they are darkened in their understanding and estranged*

⁵⁶ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XVII.4, CCL 40, 1721.* "Quid est ergo, mandatis tuis credidi, nisi, credidi quod tu illa mandaueris, non aliquis homo, quamvis per homines hominibus ministrata sint? Quia itaque credidi tua esse mandata, ipsa fides mea qua id credidi, impetret abs te gratiam qua faciam quod mandasti. Si enim homo mihi haec iuberet forinsecus; numquid, ut etiam facerem quod iubebat, adiuaret intrinsecus? Doce ergo me suauitatem inspirando caritatem, doce me disciplinam donando patientiam, doce me scientiam illuminando intelligentiam: *Quoniam mandatis tuis credidi.*"

⁵⁷ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XXVI.6, CCL 40, 1755.* "*Da mihi intellectum, et sciam testimonia tua.* Numquam intermittenda est ista petitio. Non enim sufficit accepisse intellectum, et Dei testimonia didicisse, nisi semper accipiatur, et quodam modo semper bibatur de fonte lucis aeternae. Testimonia quippe Dei, quanto fit quisque intelligentior, tanto magis magisque sciuntur."

from the way of God by the ignorance that is in them, owing to the blindness of their hearts (Eph 4:17). The blindness of the inner eyes is a lack of understanding, but as hearts are cleansed by faith (see Acts 15:9) eyes are opened and become ever clearer. It is true that without some understanding no one can believe in God; but the faith whereby we begin to believe in him has a healing effect, so that we come to understand more. There are some things that we do not believe unless we understand, and others that we do not understand unless we believe. What I mean is this: since faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17), and hearing receives the word of Christ, how can anyone believe a preacher of the faith unless he or she at least understands the language that is spoken, not to mention all else? On the other hand, there must be some things that we cannot understand unless we first believe, for the prophet says, *Unless you believe, you will not understand* (Is. 7:9, LXX). 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.⁵⁸

Grace 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. Once again he turns to Paul, showing him

⁵⁸ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XVIII.3, CCL 40, 1724.* "Nonne ipsi naturae humanae intellectus est inditus, ut eo discernatur a pecore? An sic est deformata peccando, ut etiam hoc in ea reformandum sit? Propter quod et Apostolus omnibus ad regenerationem pertinentibus dicit, *Renouamini spiritu mentis uestrae*: et utique intellectus in mente est. Hinc rursus ait, *Reformamini in nouitate sensus uestri*: de his autem qui huius regenerationis consortes non erant, *Hoc inquit, dico et testificor in Domino, ut non iam ambuletis sicut et Gentes ambulant in uanitate mentis suae, obscurati intelligentia, alienati a uia Dei per ignorantiam, quae est in illis propter caecitatem cordis eorum*. Propter hos igitur interiores oculos, quorum caecitas est non intelligere, ut aperiantur, et magis magisque serenentur, *fide corda mundantur*. Quamuis enim, nisi aliquid intelligat, nemo possit credere in Deum; tamen ipsa fide qua credit, sanatur, ut intelligat ampliora. Alia sunt enim quae nisi intelligamus, non credimus; et alia sunt quae nisi credamus, non intelligimus. Nam cum *fides sit ex auditu, auditus autem per uerbum Christi*; quomodo credit praedicanti fidem, qui, ut alia taceam, linguam ipsam quam loquitur non intelligit? Sed nisi essent rursus aliqua quae intelligere non possumus, nisi ante credamus, propheta non diceret, *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*. Proficit ergo noster intellectus ad intelligenda quae credat, et fides proficit ad credenda quae intelligat; et eadem ipsa ut magis magisque intelligantur, in ipso intellectu proficit mens. Sed hoc non fit propriis tanquam naturalibus uiribus, sed Deo adiuvante atque donante; sicut medicina fit, non natura, ut uitiatu oculus uim cernendi recipiat."

calling Christians to an on-going and ever deepening understanding of God's workings. This apostolic exhortation is aligned by the Bishop of Hippo with a key Isaian text found in his Latin text of the Septuagint, mined and explored throughout his writings as an affirmation of the complementary relationship that exists between *fides* and *ratio*: "*Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis.*" Faith leads to the *gratiae scientia* (s.XVI.6, CCL 40, 1718), a knowledge that itself is transformed by love so that it may be profitable:

... if knowledge outranks charity in importance, it does not build anyone up but only puffs him up (see 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. He realizes 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.⁵⁹

As in every other aspect of grace's working, a true knowledge and understanding of grace confirm yet again that "all is grace."

Grace and Interiority

A particularly acute challenge Augustine received from his Pelagian opponents was that his articulation of a theology of grace eviscerated human freedom, reducing it to a hollow shell. His recently completed *Contra Iulianum* must still be fresh in his mind where he noted that Julian of Eclanum charged that his theology of grace not only demoralizes the Christian, but given the central role of human sexuality in this debate, encourages licentiousness. "You say," Augustine quotes Julian,

"that I have no other intention in mind than to swear allegiance to the vices in order to make war against the virtues, to strive for the destruction of the city of God with every bit of cunning and fury, and to frighten with despair over acquiring chastity those who resist

⁵⁹ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XVII.2*, CCL 40, 1720 "... quoniam si magnitudine sua praecedit scientia magnitudinem caritatis, non aedificat, sed inflat. Cum ergo tanta fuerit caritas in bonitate suavi, 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."

shamefulness. You say that I falsely claim that the strength of foul sexual desire is so great that reason cannot govern it and hold it in check, for even the legion of apostles did not fight against it."⁶⁰

Throughout the debates Augustine's persistent response to the charge is a never flagging insistence that freedom for goodness is precisely what grace bestows.⁶¹ Grace is the *gratia liberatoris*,⁶² the very title *liberator* emphasizing the freedom bestowed. Augustine buttresses his argument in a variety of ways, in particular with the assertion that this action of grace is never invasive nor intrusive because it works from within, doing so in a loving and redemptive way, as only the creator of humankind could so make it work:

You, who are more intimate to me than my inmost self, have set a law within my heart by the action of your Spirit, as though writing it with your finger. You have written it within me so that I may not dread it like a loveless slave but love it with chaste fear like a son or daughter and fear it with chaste love.⁶³

Grace, Augustine insists, does not interfere nor enslave. Echoing here a theme that has been constant since the *Confessions*,⁶⁴ Augustine contends that this interior working of God's Spirit is alone what enables us to understand and carry out the true intent of the *lex Dei*:

This is the Spirit through whom charity is poured out in our hearts, so that by loving God and neighbor we may carry out the divine commands.⁶⁵

In its interiority, grace works upon both mind and will, conferring freedom and manifesting itself as love. God's spirit, the God who creates and redeems humanity, is able to dwell within the human heart in such a way that there is never a question of intrusion, interference,

⁶⁰ *C. Iul.* III.26.65, PL 44, 735. "... quod non sit alia mei sensus intentio, quam ad inferendum uirtutibus bellum in uitiorum sacramenta iurare, et ad excidium ciuitatis Dei, omni astu, omni furore conniti, adipiscendae castitatis desperatione repugnantes turpitudini territare, mentiri me tantas obscenae libidinis uires, ut eam ratio regere ac frenare non possit, cui nec Apostolorum legio repugnauerit."

⁶¹ See *c. Iul.* III.1.2, PL 44, 702-703.

⁶² See *nupt. et conc.* II.3.8, CSEL 42, 259-260.

⁶³ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, XXII.6, CCL 40, 1740. "Tu interior intimis meis, tu intus in corde legem posuisti mihi spiritu tuo, tanquam digito tuo; ut eam non tanquam seruus sine amore metuerem, sed casto timore ut filius diligerem, et dilectione casta timerem."

⁶⁴ *Conf.* III.6.11, CCL 27, 33.

⁶⁵ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, XIV.2, CCL 40, 1709. "Hic est ille spiritus per quem diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris, ut Deum proximumque diligendo diuina mandata faciamus."

restriction. *Suauitas* is a key term employed by Augustine to affirm how grace is present, its gentle working and delightful effect. He can thus comment on v. 65, *Suauitatem fecisti cum seruo tuo, Domine, secundum uerbum tuum*:

Now when the psalm says, *You have provided sweetness for your servant*, I think it means neither more nor less than "you determined that I should be delighted with what is good"; for to find enjoyment in goodness is a great gift from God. If the opposite is the case, and some good action enjoined by law is performed not out of delight in righteousness but from dread of punishment, because God is feared but not loved, that action is done as a slave would do it, not in a spirit of freedom. *But a slave does not stay in the house permanently, whereas a son stays for ever* (Jn 7:35), because *charity made perfect casts out fear* (1 Jn. 4:18). And so, Lord, *you have provided sweetness for your servant* by turning one who was a slave into your son or daughter.⁶⁶

This is the *libertas gloriae filiorum Dei* (Rom 8:20-25), a freedom grounded in grace, a freedom guaranteed by grace, a freedom created by grace, marked by an interior *suauitas* and *delectatio* that restores, empowers, and redirects the will toward God, once God's Spirit dwells within.

I walked continually in wide freedom, says the psalmist, *because I sought your commandments*. He sought them and found them, because he asked for and received the good Spirit. Made good by the Spirit, he was able to do good things well (*quo factus bonus bene faceret bona*) from the faith that operates through love (see Gal 5:6).⁶⁷

Once again Augustine lays out in striking and suggestive language an intimate and reciprocal relationship between God and the faithful, portraying both its graced character on God's part and the moral and spiritual integrity of the believer. There is no question of the giftedness of goodness, yet this goodness proceeds from the very heart of the sons and daughters of God and so, through grace, is truly free.

⁶⁶ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XVII.1, CCL 40, 1718-1719.* "Nihil hic ergo aliud dictum existimo, *Suauitatem fecisti cum seruo tuo*, nisi, fecisti ut me delectaret bonum. Quando enim delectat bonum, magnum est Dei donum. Quando autem bonum opus quod lex imperat, fit timore poenae, non delectatione iustitiae, cum Deus metuitur, non amatur; seruiliter fit, non liberaliter. *Seruus autem non manet in domo in aeternum, filius manet in aeternum*; quia consummata charitas foras mittit timorem. *Suauitatem itaque fecisti cum seruo tuo*, Domine, faciendo filium qui seruus fuit..."

⁶⁷ *En. Ps. CXVIII, XIV.2, CCL 40, 1709.* "Ergo ambulabam, inquit, in latitudine quoniam mandata tua exquisiui. Exquisierat et inuenerat, quoniam petierat et acceperat Spiritum bonum, quo factus bonus bene faceret bona, ex fide quae per dilectionem operatur."

Grace and Imperfection

If the contention is correct that Augustine intends this commentary to be not merely expository but to serve as a veritable handbook for servants of God making progress in holiness, an inevitable theme that must be faced concerns the question of perfection. Not surprisingly, it became another bitterly argued topic during the course of the Pelagian controversy, specifically debated under the protocol of sinlessness.⁶⁸ Can God's holy ones achieve such a state of perfection in this life that they no longer sin? Augustine's answer is unequivocal:

A difficult question was raised by a verse in this psalm. We read there, *Those who break his law have not walked in his ways* (v. 3); and the apostle John asserts that *sin is breaking God's law* (1 Jn 3:4). Yet scripture also says, and rightly, as we know, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (ibid. 1:8). How is it possible, then, that the saints are not without sin in this life and yet walk in the Lord's ways, when those who break his law do not walk in them? It is puzzling, but the apostle Paul resolves the difficulty. *It is not I who am at work, he says, but the sin that dwells in me* (Rom 7:17). How can Paul be without sin, if sin dwells within him? Yet he walks in the Lord's ways, ways untrodden by those who sin, because it is not he himself who does the bad thing but the sin dwelling in him. One problem has been solved, however, only to give rise to another that is more difficult: how can someone be said to act, when it is not he himself who performs the action? Paul asserted both these things: *What I do is what I do not want to do* (Rom 7:16), and, *It is not I who am at work, but the sin that dwells in me*. From these texts we must conclude that when it is the sin dwelling in us that is at work, we ourselves are not performing the action, for then our will in no way consents to it and even keeps control over our bodily members to restrain them from obeying sin's desires. If we do not will it, what can sin effect, other than illicit desires? If the will does not consent to such desires, there can indeed be emotional upheaval, but sin is given no scope to achieve its purpose. The apostle commanded us to make sure this is the case: *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so as to persuade you to yield to its cravings; and do not make your members available to sin as weapons of iniquity* (ibid. 6: 12, 13).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Recent scholarship has questioned Augustine's portrayal of "the Pelagians" in this regard; see M. Lamberigts, "Recent Research into Pelagianism," *Augustiniana* 52 (2002), 2/4, 181.

⁶⁹ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, III.1, CCL 40, 1671. "Propter id quod in psalmo isto scriptum est, *Non enim qui operantur iniquitatem, in uis eius ambulauerunt, quoniam peccatum iniquitas est*, sicut Ioannes apostolus dicit, exorta difficilis quaestio, Quomodo possint sancti in hac uita et non esse sine peccato, quia et illud uerum est, *Si dixerimus*

Throughout the debates about "sinlessness" Augustine has looked to Paul, finding in both his teaching and example a holiness not marked by perfection but rather by humility.⁷⁰ "Tell us please, apostle: during your life in the flesh, when you were walking in the Lord's ways, did you sin at all, or were you without sin?" (s.II.2, CCL 40, 1670). Drawing upon key and theologically dense texts from *Romans* (anchoring the just excerpted text) as well as other Pauline affirmations such as: "*Quamdiu sumus in corpore, peregrinamur a Domino; per fidem enim ambulamus, non per speciem* (2 Cor 5:6, 7), Augustine proposes a model for Christian holiness marked not by accomplishment and victory but by tension and struggle. A favorite Augustinian description of this situation, once again taken from Pauline writings, is *corpus mortis huius*, the body of this death (see ss.II.3, CCL 40, 1671; X.2, CCL 40, 1693; XX.3, CCL 40, 1731; see Rom 7:24). This is not an "anatomical" statement but a key Augustinian affirmation regarding theological anthropology: the "body of this death" refers to a present embodied experience marked by the wounds and scars of the first sin and a haunting and intractable mortality. It is buttressed by a constant reference to *peregrinatio*, *exercitatio*, and *humilitas*, true Augustinian hallmarks of the spiritual journey. *Peregrinatio* reminds one that an earthly home is not to be found: "*et in hac peregrinatione gemitu pio supernae patriae suspirarunt*" (s.VIII.1, CCL 40, 1685); *exercitatio* teaches that there is never room for complacency: "*Sic autem se in dei mandatis exercet ecclesia, aduersus omnes inimicos fidei Christianae atque catholicae* (s.VI.4, CCL 40, 1681); and *humilitas* becomes the defining characteristic of

quia peccatum non habemus, nos ipsos seducimus, et ueritas in nobis non est; et tamen ambulare uias Domini, quas non ambulant qui operantur iniquitatem: soluta est, dicente apostolo Paulo, Iam non ergo operor illud, sed id quod in me habitat peccatum. Quomodo enim est sine peccato, in quo habitat peccatum? Ambulat tamen uias Domini, quas non ambulant qui operantur; quia iam non ipse operatur illud, sed quod in eo habitat peccatum. Verumtamen ita soluta est quaestio ista, ut difficilior altera nasceretur, Quomodo agat homo quod ipse non agit. Utrumque enim dixit; et, Non quod uolo, ago; et, Non ego operor illud, sed quod habitat in me peccatum. Unde intelligere debemus, quando peccatum quod habitat in nobis, operatur in nobis, tunc nos id non operari; quando nequaquam ei uoluntas nostra consentit, et tenet etiam corporis membra, ne obediatis desideriis eius. Quid enim operatur peccatum nolentibus nobis, nisi sola illicita desideria? Quibus si uoluntatis non adhibeatur assensus; mouetur quidem nonnullus affectus, sed nullus ei relaxatur effectus. Hoc praecepit idem apostolus, ubi dicit: Non ergo regnet peccatum in uestro mortali corpore, ad obediendum desideriis eius; nec exhibeatis membra uestra arma iniquitatis peccato."

⁷⁰ In this regard see the comments by Pierre-Marie Hombert, "*Gloria Gratiae*". *Se glorifie en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustinienne de la grâce* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996), 306-310.

Christian holiness, placing in proper perspective all other virtues and aspirations: *profecto haec ipsa humilitas in loco peregrinationis huius, quae nox recte intelligitur, prodest eis qui salubriter exercentur in ea, ut discant non superbire*; (s.XV.8, CCL 40, 1715). It is from this perspective that Augustine offers a model for the spiritual journey that is marked by a progressive rather than a success model: *et quamdiu uiuitur in hoc mundo, proficientium est ista cantatio* (s.XVII.2, CCL 40, 1719). This emphasis on *proficere* enables Augustine to insist on improvement and yet hold firm to a notion of imperfection. This is not meant to encourage mediocrity or negligence, rather its intent is a humble diligence.

Let Christ's holy family raise a different cry, Christ's holy fellowship that is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, humble in its truthfulness and truthful in its humility. Let it shout, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is so faithful and just that he forgives us our sins, and cleanses us from all iniquity* (1 Jn 1:8-9). This declaration must be matched by inner conviction, for humility will be genuine if it is not so much flaunted by the tongue as modeled on the apostle's description: *Not haughty, but of one mind with humble folk*. (Rom 12:16).⁷¹

This awareness of imperfection prompts both humble dedication and an ever-deepening receptivity to progressing in God's grace: "*et ab hac morte si perseueranter proficit, quotidie reuiuiscere, uiuificante illo, cuius gratia homo noster interior renouatur de die in diem*" (2 Cor 4.16).

Via gratiae⁷²

If Augustine has given to those entrusted with the task of teaching and preaching the scriptures the capstone for his monumental *opus* on the Psalter, he has equally offered in this lengthy series of

⁷¹ *En. Ps. CXVIII*, II.1, CCL 40, 1669. "Exclamet autem sancta familia Christi, fructificans et crescens in uniuerso mundo, humiliter uerax et ueraciter humilis; exclamet, inquam: *Si dixerimus quia peccatum non habemus, nos ipsos seducimus, et ueritas in nobis non est. Quod si confessi fuerimus delicta nostra, fidelis est et iustus, ut dimittat nobis peccata nostra, et mundet nos ab omni iniquitate. Haec ut dicuntur, ita sentiantur. Tunc enim erit humilitas uera, si non sola ostentetur in lingua; ut simus secundum Apostolum, non alta sapientes, sed humilibus consentientes.*"

⁷² *En. Ps. CXVIII*, X.6, CCL 40, 1695. "Non currerem, nisi dilatasses cor meum."

homilies a veritable guide, complex as it is comprehensive, for the journey of grace. In the step-by-step exposition, each verse of the great psalm, one might say, shedding light on yet another stage or aspect of the path of grace, Augustine sets forth not so much a systematic program for attaining virtue and holiness but rather a set of guiding values and principles. The very expansive nature of the commentary suggests the dynamic and unprogrammable character of the journey of faith, one that cannot be circumscribed by rubrical formulas, one that cannot be simplistically reduced to specific practices or behavioral details, yet a journey in need of guiding values and principles grounded in, expressive of, and secured by key Christological and scriptural affirmations. The foundational affirmation remains always *gratia Christi*, humbly acknowledged and lovingly lived, so that *gratia*, *caritas*, and *humilitas* become together the hallmarks of an Augustinian vision of the Christian life. What is perhaps most remarkable about the exposition is the way it takes all of the hard-fought theological principles of the Pelagian controversy and turns them into living precepts for making progress in grace. It reminds us that Augustine the theologian and polemicist can never be separated from Augustine the pastor and spiritual guide – and himself *servus Dei*. His insistence that “all is grace” is never merely a theoretical or academic insistence but is intended to be a profound statement about the Christian life, how it is to be lived, its affirmation offering the only sure guide for a true life in God, the life of faith and holiness. It is equally evident that Augustine never discounted the importance of *understanding* the journey, its history, make-up, content, and implications: the Psalmist’s *da mihi intellectum* becomes both a call and a warrant to undertake the journey intelligently, with heart **and** mind, the scriptures ever in hand as both map and mirror. In the end, the expositor has received from Augustine not only a valuable exegetical-hermeneutical resource, but perhaps even more importantly, a vision of the journey of faith, with the law of grace as both light and path.

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