

AN ANTI-PELAGIAN CAUEAT AUGUSTINE'S EP. 188 TO JULIANA

During the winter of 417/418¹ Augustine and Alypius wrote a letter to *Anicia Iuliana*² (=Juliana), *inlustris filia*³ and *famula Dei*⁴, a *domina* belonging to the *gens Anicia*⁵. This family was simultaneously one of the most aristocratic and wealthy families of the Roman Empire⁶ and one of the most renowned in Christianity. In fact, according to Prudentius, the first high-ranked conversions to the Christian faith⁷ among the Roman aristocracy, at least in the male line⁸, took place among this *gens*.

¹ See O. WERMELINGER, *Rom und Pelagius. Die theologische Position der römischen Bischöfe im pelagianischen Streit in den Jahren 411-432* (PuP, 7), Stuttgart, 1975, p. 205, n. 353. Although Hombert initially gives the traditional dating of 417/418 (cf. P.-M. HOMBERT, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustiniennne* [CEAug.SA, 163], Paris, 2000, p. 225), he later makes his preference for the beginning of 418 clear (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 227, n. 55 and p. 640).

² See C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Anicia Iuliana* 3, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. I: A-K, Rome, 1999, pp. 1169-1171.

³ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Ep. 188, inscriptio* and 1,1, CSEL 57, p. 119.

⁴ *Id.*, *De bono uiduitatis (inscriptio)*, CSEL 41, p. 305.

⁵ Cf. JEROME, *Ep. 130,3*, CSEL 56, p. 170; AUGUSTINE, *Ep. 150*, CSEL 44, p. 381.

⁶ Cf. AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum* 27,11,1, ed. M.-A. MARIÉ (Le Belles Lettres), pp. 137-138; PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA, *De bellis* 1,2,27, ed. D. ROQUES (Les Belles Lettres), p. 33.

⁷ Although his words should not be accepted uncritically, Prudentius does affirm that Sextus Anicius Petronius Probus was the first to add to the prestige of Christian Rome with his conversion: "Fertur enim ante alios generosus Anicius urbis / inlustrasse caput" (PRUDENTIUS, *Contra Symmachum* 1, vv. 552-553, CCL 126, p. 204). Laurence writes: "On peut fort bien admettre que Probus ait conçu cette conversion comme l'un des moyens de confirmer le pouvoir et l'influence de sa famille en s'inscrivant dans une évolution religieuse éminemment liée à celle de la politique. (...) il ne pouvait s'agir que d'un christianisme «moyen»" (P. LAURENCE, *Proba, Juliana et Démétrias. Le christianisme des femmes de la gens Anicia dans la première moitié du V^e siècle*, in REAug 48 [2002] 131-163, p. 136).

⁸ We should not forget that Faltonia Vetitia Proba (see C. and L. PIETRI [eds.], *Faltonia Vetitia Proba*, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. II: L-Z, Rome, 2000, p. 1831), had written a *carmen sacrum*, the *Cento uergilianus de laudibus Christi* (cf. PROBA, *Cento*, CSEL 16/1, pp. 568-609). According to Laurence, "de manière presque systématique, la conversion des femmes a précédé celle des hommes, surtout dans cette classe où les charges officielles ont longtemps été liées au culte traditionnel: il est fortement probable qu'au III^e siècle, et même au II^e, des femmes de cette famille étaient déjà chrétiennes" (P. LAURENCE, *op. cit.*, p. 136).

Juliana, who had married *Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius*, son of *Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus*⁹ and *Anicia Faltonia Proba*¹⁰, and consul in 395, was widowed before the sack of Rome in 410¹¹. Together with her children¹² (one of whom was *Demetrias*¹³), her mother-in-law Proba and a group of *uirgines* and widows, she left Rome after the sack and, like many of her fellow-citizens¹⁴, she went into exile. Juliana's group initially travelled to Southern Gaul before finally setting in North Africa, where the *Anicii* had vast possessions. After "buying" their safety by letting part of their fortune be confiscated¹⁵ by the corrupt and cruel *Heraclianus*, *comes* of Africa, they settled in Carthage¹⁶.

Although Proba and Juliana must have met Augustine soon after their arrival in Africa¹⁷, their official introduction took place between 412 and 413 during one of the Bishop of Hippo's visits to Carthage¹⁸.

⁹ See C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus* 3, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. II: L-Z, Rome, 2000, pp. 1840-1841.

¹⁰ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 130,30, CSEL 44, p. 76. See C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Anicia Faltonia Proba* 2, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. II, *cit.*, pp. 1831-1833.

¹¹ Cf. JEROME, *Ep.* 130,3, CSEL 56, p. 177.

¹² Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De bono uiduitatis* 8,11 and 14,18, CSEL 41, pp. 315 and 324-325; JEROME, *Ep.* 130,6, CSEL 56, p. 182.

¹³ See G. BARDY, *Démetriade*, in *DSp* 3 (1957) 133-137; O. WERMELINGER, *Demetrias*, in *AugL* 2 (1996) 289-290; C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Demetrias Amnia*, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. I, *cit.*, pp. 544-547.

¹⁴ For more on this diaspora see S. MAZZARINO, *L'impero romano*, Vol. III, Bari, 1976, pp. 798ff.

¹⁵ "...tacita proscriptione mercata sit" (JEROME, *Ep.* 130,7, CSEL 56, p. 185).

¹⁶ After leading a rebellion against the emperor Honorius, *Heraclianus* was eventually executed at Carthage in 413. See A. MANDOUZE *et al.* (eds.), *Heraclianus*, in *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 1: Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, Paris, 1982, pp. 552-553.

¹⁷ Augustine's *Ep.* 130 on prayer (CSEL 44, pp. 40-77) and *Ep.* 131 (CSEL 44, pp. 77-79), both addressed to Proba and written in 412, suggest that an epistolary exchange had already taken place between the bishop of Hippo and the little group of *dominae* (see P.-M. HOMBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 250, n. 13). Moreover, we may gather that Augustine had already had some sort of relation with the *Anicii* after his own conversion, presumably during his second stay in Rome (387-388), before he returned to Africa. Ties with the *Anicii* family are documented in an inscription written by *Anicius Bassus* for Monica, the mother of Augustine, who died in Ostia in 387. This inscription celebrates both the mother and the son (cf. *Anicius Aucherius Bassus*, in C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, T. I, *cit.*, p. 271).

¹⁸ "Licet enim uos per litteras primum, deinde etiam praesentia corporali pia et catholica..." (AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,1,1, CSEL 57, p. 119).

It was on that occasion that Augustine encouraged Demetrias' sacred *propositum* to assume the virginal veil, in spite of the fact that a marriage had already been arranged for her. In the end, Demetrias' determination, in combination with Augustine's support¹⁹, managed to win Juliana and Proba's blessing: the *uelatio* was performed by Aurelius, the Bishop of Carthage²⁰, some time in 413. Augustine learned of the consecration after receiving a letter written by both Juliana and Proba²¹. He replied to them expressing great joy for the good news and thanking them for the present (*apophoretum*) with which the news was accompanied²².

In 414 Juliana received the treatise *De bono uiduitatis* that Augustine had written at her request²³. In it Juliana was encouraged to live her *continentia uidualis* in the same way her daughter was living her virginal consecration²⁴. As for Demetrias, Augustine suggested (apparently without having received a specific request) that she should read his treatise *De sancta uirginitate*²⁵, a work written earlier²⁶ in response to Jovinian's appeals against virginity and perpetual continence. Juliana had also been previously advised to read this

¹⁹ Augustine himself mentions the influence he exercised on Demetrias' decision: "...cuius ministerii nostri adiuvante gratia et misericordia saluatoris in domo uestra tantus fructus exortus est, ut humanis nuptiis iam paratis sancta Demetrias spiritalem sponsi illius praeferret amplexum" (*Ibid.* 188,1,1, p. 120).

²⁰ "...ad inprecationem pontificis" (JEROME, *Ep.* 130,2, *CSEL* 56, p. 176).

²¹ "Nesciremus autem, quem ad modum nostra illa tunc exhortatio a fideli et nobili uirgine fuisset accepta, nisi nobis profectis, cum post paululum professa fuisset sanctimoniam uirginalem, hoc ingens Dei donum, quod per seruos quidem suos plantat et rigat, sed per se ipsum dat incrementum, nobis operariis prouenisse uestrarum litterarum laetissimo nuntio et ueraci testimonio disceremus" (AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,1,1, *CSEL* 57, p. 120).

²² Cf. *Id.*, *Ep.* 150, *CSEL* 44, pp. 380-382. The *apophoretum*, like that sent to Augustine on the occasion of Demetrias' *uelatio* ("uelationis apophoretum": *Ibid.*, p. 382), was a present given at dinner-table for guests to take home.

²³ Cf. *Id.*, *De bono uiduitatis* 1,1, *CSEL* 41, pp. 305-306; *Ibid.* 14,18, pp. 324-325.

²⁴ "Nunc ergo illi regi, qui unicae sponsae, cuius membra estis, speciem concupivit, ueraciter simul placete, simul inhaerete, illa integritate uirginali, tu continentia uiduali, ambae pulchritudine spiritali" (*Ibid.* 19,24, p. 334).

²⁵ "Virgo autem sancta proles uestra, si aliquid de sua professione desiderat ex laboribus nostris, habet grandem librum *de sancta uirginitate*, quem legat" (*Ibid.* 23,29, p. 342).

²⁶ The usual dating of Augustine's *De sancta uirginitate* is 401. According to Hombert, however, this little treatise was actually written in two stages: chs. 1-38 in 404, and chs. 39-57 in 412 (cf. P.-M. Hombert, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-136 and 638). Interestingly, Hombert's hypothesis does account for the anti-Pelagian use of *impeccantia* (cf. AUGUSTINE, *De sancta uirginitate* 50,51, *CSEL* 41, p. 296). This usage could not have occurred as early as 401.

work which, in the words of Augustine, contained many useful things for both kinds of continence, namely that of a virgin and that of a widow²⁷. Finally, after Juliana's group had returned to Rome, she wrote a letter (now lost) to Augustine with the aim of reassuring him that she and her *domuncula* were far removed from persons corrupting the catholic faith with their perverse writings²⁸, and that they remained steadfast with respect to the orthodox teaching of the Church. The reassurance went as far as asserting that they were all on guard even against small errors (*paruos errores*)²⁹.

It is at this point that a joint letter, the *Ep.* 188, was sent to Juliana by Augustine and Alypius. Knowing about the ties existing between Pelagius and the *Anicii*, the two bishops remained suspicious that Juliana's household was still sympathetic to Pelagianism. They repeated their warning about those who were hostile to the doctrine of grace (viz. the Pelagians, although they are not explicitly mentioned), and advised her to pray so that she might continue to receive God's grace.

The aim of this contribution is to analyse and set *Ep.* 188 (which presents itself as a short anti-Pelagian manifesto³⁰) in its broader historical and theological context. The reason for the two bishops to reiterate the doctrinal errors of the Pelagians came from an anonymous writing addressed to Demetrias, a writing which Augustine and Alypius suspected to be the work of Pelagius because of the theories therein expounded. In point of fact, Pelagius, an old acquaintance of the *Anicii*, had indeed written a letter addressed to Demetrias³¹ at the request of her mother Juliana, just as Jerome had done³².

²⁷ Cf. *Id.*, *De bono uiduitatis*. 23,29, *CSEL* 41, pp. 342-343.

²⁸ "...qui prauis tractatibus uenerandam fidem saepe corrumpunt" (cit. in *Id.*, *Ep.* 188,1,2, *CSEL* 57, p. 121).

²⁹ Cf. *infra*, n. 39.

³⁰ Notable examples of anti-Pelagian manifestos disguised as *epistulae* are Augustine's letters to Hilary (cf. *Ep.* 157, *CSEL* 44, pp. 449-488), to Innocent (cf. *Ep.* 177, *CSEL* 44, pp. 669-688), to Sixtus (cf. *Ep.* 194, *CSEL* 57, pp. 176-214) and to Vitalis (cf. *Ep.* 217, *CSEL* 57, pp. 403-425).

³¹ PELAGIUS, *Ep. ad Demetriadem*, *PL* 30, cc. 15-45.

³² Cf. JEROME, *Ep.* 130, *CSEL* 56, pp. 175-201. It is likely, however, that the insistence ("in extorquendo": *Ibid.* 130,1, p. 176) with which Jerome was asked by Proba and Juliana to write to Demetrias, was the result of Augustine's pressure on the two aristocratic *dominae*. In point of fact it seems very strange that Jerome was also asked for spiritual advice since it is well-known that he did not enjoy a good relationship with the *Anicii* (see W. DUNPHY, *Saint Jerome and the Gens Anicia*, [*Ep.* 130 to Demetrias], in *SP* 18/4, Kalamazoo-Louvain, 1990, pp. 139-145). Dunphy suggests that Augustine, having learned the request made to Pelagius, must have "convinced Proba to forget the old rancour and invite Jerome's contribution to bal-

1. Ep. 188 and its anti-Pelagian caveat

To start with, the fact that Augustine writes to Juliana, and not to Demetrias, cannot be passed over without comment. As it has been suggested, and probably correctly, that this fact shows that Augustine did "not construe Demetrias as the governing principle of her own ascetic life"³³. By focusing on her mother, he seems to suggest "the inability and lack of authority in the daughter"³⁴, whom, due to her young age³⁵, he probably believed to be still naive and highly impressionable³⁶.

Augustine begins Ep. 188 reiterating the warning (*admonitio*) he had made to Juliana on a previous occasion (probably in a letter now lost), against unorthodox opinions (*contraria gratiae Dei dogmata*)³⁷. Although it appears that the first warning did not fall on deaf ears³⁸, Augustine felt it necessary to repeat it, in spite of Juliana's assurance that her *domuncula* was nothing if not orthodox. According

ance that of Pelagius. In the meantime he [Augustine] could wait until he had read more of Pelagius' writings" (*Ibid.*, pp. 144-145). In fact, "it is only after he has read Pelagius' contribution that he [Augustine] will write a critique of that letter. Augustine had no wish to enter into direct conflict with Pelagius without having some definite written evidence of his thought to hand" (*Ibid.*, p. 144).

³³ A. S. JACOBS, *Writing Demetrias: Ascetic Logic in Ancient Christianity*, in *Church History. Studies in Christianity and Culture* 69 (2000) 719-748, p. 732.

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ We may surmise that Demetrias was about 14/15 years old. In the late Roman Empire girls could be married within two or three years of their puberty, the latter roughly coinciding with the 12th birthday. As Macrobius writes: "Nam et secundum iura publica duodecim annus in femina et quartus decimus in puero definit pubertatis aetatem" (MACROBIUS, *Saturnalia* 7,7,6, ed. I. WILLIS, Teubner, Stutgardiae et Lipsiae, 1994, p. 423). See also TERTULLIAN, *De uirginibus uelandis* 11,6, CCL 2, p. 1221.

³⁶ This can be inferred from Augustine's somehow ironic words: "...legat uirgo Christi, unde credat uirginalem suam sanctitatem omnesque spiritales diuitias non nisi ex se ipsa sibi esse, atque ita, (...) discat Deo esse – quod absit! – ingrata" (AUGUSTINE, Ep. 188,2,4, CSEL 57, p. 122).

³⁷ *Id.*, Ep. 188,1,2, CSEL 57, p. 120. In his *De bono uiduitatis*, however, Augustine had already warned Juliana about the opinions of friends who unduly emphasize man's natural ability to do good. Cf., e. g.: "Sic enim conantur defendere hominis liberum arbitrium, ut eo solo etiam Dei gratia non adiuti ualeamus, quod diuinitus iubetur, implere" (*Id.*, *De bono uiduitatis* 17,21, CSEL 41, p. 329); "nisi ... in hominis constituent potestate non adiuta Dei munere, sed solo arbitrio liberae uoluntatis exerta – quasi possit esse ad perficiendum opus bonum uoluntas libera nisi Dei munere liberata – ..." (*Ibid.* 18,22, p. 331).

³⁸ "Sane, quod me hortatur reuerentia uestra, ne aures indulgeam his hominibus, qui prauis tractatibus uenerandam fidem saepe corrumpunt, gratias uberes ago tam pia admonitioni" (from Juliana's letter to Augustine, cit. in *Id.*, Ep. 188,1,2, pp. 120-121).

to the Roman *domina*, her household adhered so closely to the Catholic teaching that not only were heresies or persons propagating opinions contrary to the faith carefully avoided, but they also avoided those teachings which merely *seemed* to contain small errors (*paruos errores*)³⁹.

One wonders whether Juliana's words are an indication that by 417/418, i. e. in the heat of the Pelagian controversy, Pelagius' previous connection with the *gens Anicia* had already been weakened, or, even more drastically, whether the *Anicii* had once and for all distanced themselves from Pelagius and his movement. On one hand, Juliana's words, if taken literally, would incline us to believe that something of this nature must have occurred. But, on the other hand, the vagueness of the reference to "small errors" impels us to investigate their exact meaning preventing us from drawing hasty conclusions. If the latter, one possible explanation is that, while professing her attachment to the Catholic teaching and while trying to dispel Augustine's apprehensions about the orthodoxy of her household, Juliana was also trying to free an old friend and spiritual adviser from the accusations of heresy. In this interpretation, Juliana's words would seem to be an attempt to communicate the opinion that Pelagius was not unorthodox but that he had merely fallen into "small errors"! If Juliana's ties with Pelagianism were never broken, or if they had even been intensified after Pelagius' and Coelestius' rehabilitation in 417, it would seem to follow that Juliana and her *domuncula* were unable to see Pelagianism as a heresy, as Augustine's fears and suspicions would suggest⁴⁰. For Juliana and her household, Pelagius, besides

³⁹ "Sed nouerit sacerdotium uestrum longe me ac domunculam meam ab huius modi personis esse discretam; omnisque familia nostra adeo catholicam sequitur fidem, ut in nullam haeresim aliquando deuiauerit nec umquam lapsa sit, non dico in eas sectas, quae uix expiantur, sed nec in eas, quae paruos habere uidentur errores" (from Juliana's letter to Augustine, cit. in *Ibid.* 188,1,3, p. 121).

⁴⁰ This can be inferred from Augustine's reaction to her conviction that heresies worthy of this name are only those opposing the Trinitarian doctrine: "...sed non hinc solum error humanus obrepit, ut aliquid secus sentiatur de indiuidua Trinitate. Sunt enim et alia, in quibus perniciosissime erratur, sicuti hoc est, unde diutius fortasse, quam satis esset uestrae fideli castaeque prudentiae, in hac epistula locuti sumus" (*Ibid.* 188,3,10, pp. 127-128). As Brown writes: "The noble Roman Christians who had read the 'Letter to Demetrias' with pleasure, were frankly unimpressed by the dire warnings of Augustine and Alypius. Demetrias' mother, Juliana, will put these fussy, provincial bishops firmly in their place: her family had never been touched by any heresy (...). A good Christian of the Later Empire, 'heresy' to her had meant Greek errors on the Godhead, not African scruples on grace and freewill" (P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, London, 1967, pp. 355-356).

being "an ardent ascetic who had written an urgent admonition for their daughter"⁴¹, was and remained an old friend. Despite his fall from grace, their esteem and sympathy towards the renowned ascetic and spiritual adviser remained unbroken⁴².

Juliana's ambiguity, however, failed to reduce Augustine's growing suspicions regarding the real extent of her understanding and, hence, her repudiation of Pelagius' views, views with which the *Anicii* had been familiar for a long time, probably since the British reformer began his ministry to the Roman élite in the last decade of the 4th century⁴³. These suspicions were the grounds for the Bishop of Hippo for writing to Juliana, whose household, he knew, exercised a considerable influence in the Christian milieu⁴⁴. He tried to help her see how dangerous the Pelagian teaching was, a task made especially difficult when it was so subtly disguised. As Augustine would contend, that which may appear to be harmless or to be the mere result of one's overzealous Christian commitment could in fact be the cause of serious error and be replete with dire consequences when set against the orthodox understanding of Christian doctrine and ascetic praxis.

Thus Augustine begins to explain why the views of Pelagius (who Augustine clearly suspects to be the true author of the writing to Demetrius⁴⁵) are dangerous. The Pelagian attribution to human free

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 344.

⁴² "Sans faire ouvertement adhésion aux doctrines de Pélage, Proba et Juliana ne cessèrent de lui garder leur estime" (G. de PLINVAL, *Pélage. Ses écrits, sa vie et sa réforme. Étude d'histoire littéraire et religieuse*, Lausanne et al., 1943, pp. 215-216).

⁴³ We should not forget that Pelagius had probably lived in Rome for more than twenty years, until he left it after the city was taken by Alaric in 410. There he came in touch with the great Christian families, above all the *Anicii*: "À Rome il [*Pélage*] semble avoir eu accès dans les grandes maisons chrétiennes, chez Marcella, chez Pammaque et Océanus. Mais il y a surtout une famille dont la protection avouée ou devinée procura à Pélage un incontestable appui: c'est la *gens Anicia*" (G. DE PLINVAL, *op. cit.*, p. 214). As to the support of the Roman aristocracy to Pelagius see: P. BROWN, *Aspects of Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy*, in *Id.*, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustin*, London, 1972, pp. 161-182; *Id.*, *Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment*, in *Ibid.* pp. 183-207; *Id.*, *The Patrons of Pelagius: the Roman Aristocracy between East and West*, in *Ibid.* pp. 208-226.

⁴⁴ A mild form of *captatio benevolentiae*, is perhaps included in Augustine's referring to Juliana's household a "no small Church of Christ": "Domum enim uestram non paruum Christi ecclesiam deputamus" (AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,1,3, *CSEL* 57, p. 121). See also: "Nam illud optime nouimus cum omnibus uestris cultores uos esse et fuisse indiuiduae Trinitatis" (*Ibid.* 188,3,10, p. 127).

⁴⁵ Pelagius' name will only crop up in the last paragraph of the letter: cf. (*Ibid.* 188,3,14, p. 130). Augustine will claim with certainty Pelagius' authorship of the *Ep. ad Demetriadem* in his *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (cf. 1,37,40, *CSEL* 42, p. 155).

will, rather than to God's gift of grace, of the ability to pursue a life of *iustitia*, *continentia*, *pietas* and *castitas*, should not be regarded as a *paruus error*⁴⁶. On the contrary it is precisely this perilous conviction that must be so rigorously opposed. To share this view it would also necessitate the acceptance of the opinion that God's grace, which is necessary to live justly and uprightly, works merely through human nature and scriptural revelation. This, in its turn, would entail the belief that both the ability to will the good and to love God and one's neighbours ultimately depend on man, who would thus be regarded as being sufficient in himself and able of his own will (*arbitrio proprio*) to perform anything he wishes and which is dear to him⁴⁷. No doubt, Augustine continues, those who hold such opinions and refuse to accept the Apostle's words that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5,5)⁴⁸, refuse also to accept that only divine grace (and more specifically the grace of the Saviour) enables human beings to seek perfect life. The inability to recognize this truth, Augustine concludes, cannot be regarded as a trivial matter; it is actually an indication of how greatly one may err⁴⁹.

At this point Augustine reveals the cause of his preoccupations with regard to the spiritual well-being of Juliana and her household: they must not listen to the exhortations contained in the anonymous writing addressed to Demetrias, where it is said that virginal purity and the spiritual riches that she enjoys come from herself alone. For support, Augustine then quotes from that anonymous writing:

In this respect too, then, you have possessions which rightly entitle you to be set above others, indeed even more so; for everyone realizes that your nobility in the physical sense and your wealth belong to your family, not to you, but no one except you yourself will be able to endow you with spiritual riches, and it is for these that you are rightly to be praised, for these that you are deservedly set above others, and they are things which cannot be within you unless they come from you⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ *Id.*, *Ep.* 188,1,3, *CSEL* 57, p. 121.

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

⁴⁸ See A.-M. LA BONNARDIÈRE, *Le verset paulinien Rom. V,5 dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin*, in *AugMag*, T. II, Paris, 1954, pp. 657-665.

⁴⁹ "...quantum et quam exitiabiliter erret" (AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,1,3, p. 122). See also the expression "perniciossissime erratur" (*Ibid.* 188,3,10, p. 128).

⁵⁰ "Habes ergo et hic per quae merito praeponaris aliis, immo hinc magis; nam corporalis nobilitas atque opulentia tuorum intellegentur esse non tua, spiritales uero diuitias nullus tibi praeter te conferre poterit. In his ergo iure laudanda, in his merito ceteris praeferenda es, quae nisi ex te et in te esse non possunt" (*Ibid.*, 188,2,4, p. 122; Augustine's quotation is taken from PELAGIUS, *Ep. ad Demetriadem* 11, *PL*

According to Augustine, to believe that the spiritual riches that Demetrias enjoys are to be found in herself and come from her, is not only the result of a venomous theory (*uirus*)⁵¹ but is also a clear sign of ingratitude towards God⁵². The best reply to such a view is given by the Apostle's words: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the excellency of power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4,7).

2. Augustine's short manifesto against Pelagian tenets

At this point, with rapid brush-strokes and in the light of his understanding of the doctrine of grace, Augustine synthesizes what he considers to be the main errors of Pelagianism, in order to once again put Juliana on guard against them.

A. The goodness and the freedom of the will

Once again the bishop of Hippo affirms that the spiritual goods do not originate in Demetrias' good will, her faith, or her righteousness. These all must be seen as God's gifts bestowed by grace. Undoubtedly man's free will has a say in the decision-making process concerning the good that has to be pursued. Yet, unlike the anonymous writer, Augustine counters the belief that the accomplishment of good rests on the operation of the free will alone. Man's good will (*bona uoluntas*) in the act of doing good is made possible precisely because his freedom (*arbitrium*) is enlightened and sustained by grace⁵³. Therefore it is not enough to appeal to the teaching of revelation, as though one could derive from it alone the necessary strength to persevere in faith and to keep God's commandments. God is at work in both man's willing and acting (cf. Phil 2,13) through the inspiration of love (*caritas*) which is the only thing that enables him

30, p. 26). For this English translation, see: B. R. REES, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers*, Woodbridge, 1991, p. 48. See also AUGUSTINE, Ep. 188,2,7 and 8, CSEL 57, pp. 125 and 126; *Ibid.* 188,3,14, p. 130. As Wermelinger writes: "Die Widerlegung der Demetriasstelle (...) geschieht ganz im Geiste des 5. Kanons der Karthagischen Konzils vom 1. Mai 418" (O. WERMELINGER, *Rom und Pelagius*, cit., p. 205, n. 353).

⁵¹ AUGUSTINE, Ep. 188,2,5, CSEL 57, p. 123.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.* 188,2,4, p. 122 (see *supra*, n. 36).

⁵³ "Proprium quippe arbitrium nisi Dei gratia iuuetur, nec ipsa bona uoluntas esse in homine potest" (*Ibid.* 188,2,7, p. 125).

to turn to God and to put into practice what he has learned from scriptural revelation⁵⁴. The mere knowledge of God's law is not enough to bring it into effect. Only the love that God bestows on man helps him to walk in that direction⁵⁵.

In a nutshell, Augustine sketches his teaching on the relationship between grace and free will and, in line with his theocentric and predestinarian view, he explains the centrality of God's love working in the heart of man. Closely connected to this theocentrism is the distinction (*discretio*) that God makes with regard to those He wishes to set apart from the *massa mortis perditionisque*⁵⁶. While he is sure that all the members which comprise this *massa* originated in Adam's disobedience, the bishop of Hippo cannot be explicit with regard to how this *discretio* actually comes about. Later, for example, when he quotes Lc 19,10 (*Venit quaerere et saluare quod perierat*) he seems to retain the general understanding that Christ has come to save all humanity because all men have perished in the fall of their forefather Adam and, hence, need to be saved. And all this in spite of the fact that on this particular point Augustine developed and retained until the end of his life a predestinarian view whereby salvation is restricted to the *electi*.

B. Humility and obedience vs. boasting

From his *répertoire* of scriptural passages Augustine frequently cited 1 Cor 4,7, a verse that has become a favourite for support of his view on the sovereignty of God's grace: *Quid enim habes, quod non accepisti? Si autem et accepisti, quid gloriaris, quasi non acceperis?* (1 Cor 4,7)⁵⁷. He uses this verse to counter the implicit sense of ingratitude towards God he feels Pelagius' teaching contains⁵⁸. For example, Augustine describes Demetrius' consecration as a gift of God (*Dei*

⁵⁴ "Non (...) tantum modo scientiam reuelando, ut nouerimus, quid facere debeamus, sed etiam inspirando caritatem, ut ea, quae discendo nouimus, etiam diligendo faciamus" (*Loc. cit.*). Cf. also *Ibid.* 188,1,3, p. 121.

⁵⁵ "Non igitur tantum modo in hoc nos adiuuat Deus, ut sciamus, quid agendum sit, uerum etiam ut amando agamus, quod discendo iam scimus" (*Ibid.* 188,2,8, p. 126).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 188,2,7, p. 125.

⁵⁷ See also allusions in *Ibid.* 188,2,8, p. 126; 188,3,9, p. 127; 188,3,14, p. 130. This scriptural quotation will be used over and over again in Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings: see the list provided in P.-M. HOMBERT, *Gloria gratiae. Se glorifier en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustinienne de la grâce* (CEAug.SA - 148), Paris, 1996, pp. 22-24.

⁵⁸ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,2,4, CSEL 57, p. 122 (see *supra*, n. 36).

donum)⁵⁹, and he is at pains to state that her *sanctimonial/continentia uirginalis* is not something she has achieved on her own strength, as though it were the result of her decision and commitment. Relying on texts such as Jac 1,17 ("Omne datum optimum, et omne donum perfectum desursum est descendens a Patre luminum")⁶⁰ and Wis 8,21-22 ("Et cum scirem quia nemo potest esse continens, nisi Deus det. Et hoc ipsum erat sapientiae, scire cuius esset hoc donum")⁶¹, the Bishop of Hippo stresses that the choice of undertaking a life of virginal continence does not rest on human capabilities but is the result of divine grace as that grace is given by the Holy Spirit. Only when divine action is assumed can one affirm that the gifts of continence and chastity belong *also* to the person upon whom it is bestowed, even though such a person is the "recipient" and not the source of the gift⁶². Thus, Demetrias' boasting regarding her own consecration must be rooted in God, the cause of all her gifts and the unique cause of her ability to boast⁶³. Only in this way, namely by recognizing that God alone is the source of all her spiritual *bona*, will she be able to continue to progress toward a life of perfection. She must acknowledge that the progress comes not by or as a result of human encouragement, but thanks to God's grace working in her. From this, it also becomes clear what the primary purpose of Christian prayer is. Referring to 1 Thess 5,17-18 ("Sine intermissione orate, in omnibus gratias agite")⁶⁴, Augustine underlines that one should not pray to God only in order to be helped in growing and persevering in the good, but above all to *obtain* the good⁶⁵.

It is worth recalling, at this stage, the understanding that Augustine had of humility and obedience and how he developed it in close connection with the role Christ plays in his doctrine of grace.

Among all the scriptural passages that played a role in the Bishop of Hippo's doctrine of Christ's incarnation and redemption⁶⁶,

⁵⁹ "De ipsa quoque sacra continentia uirginali, quod non sibi sit ex se ipsa, sed sit Dei donum" (*Ibid.* 188,1,2, p. 120). See also *Ibid.* 188,2,6, p. 123.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 188,2,6, p. 124.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.* 188,2,8, p. 126, and 188,3,12, p. 129. See A.-M. LA BONNARDIÈRE, *Le livre de la Sagesse* (Biblia Augustiniana), Paris, 1970, esp. Pp. 103-107 and 277-288.

⁶² "Haec Dei dona sunt et uestra quidem sunt sed non ex uobis" (AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,2,6, *CSEL* 57, p. 124).

⁶³ "Ita quippe est in ea salubriter gloria eius, cum Deus, qui in illa est, ipse est gloria eius, a quo habet omnia bona, quibus est bona,..." (*Ibid.* 188,3,9, p. 127).

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 188,2,7, pp. 124-125.

⁶⁵ Cf. *loc. cit.*

⁶⁶ See A. DIHLE, *Demut*, in *RAC* 3 (1957) 735-778, c. 772.

two are especially important: Jn 1,14 and Phil 2,6-8. Christ is not only the *magister humilitatis*⁶⁷ and the *doctor humilitatis*⁶⁸, but also the example that the believer has to imitate (*exemplum humilitatis*)⁶⁹. In this way Christ shows that humility has its fountain-head in the Son of God made flesh, in the *Deus humilis*⁷⁰. "The way of humility", Augustine writes, "comes from no other source; it comes only from Christ. It is the way originated by him who, though most high, came in humility"⁷¹. Precisely because it is rooted in God and not in man's commitments and achievements, Augustine considers humility as a permanent ontological character of which man should be conscious⁷². His truest characteristic is, in fact, his consciousness of being a creature, of being dependent on God the creator and, most importantly, on his gift of grace and salvation⁷³. Whether he recognizes it or not, his existence is marked by this innate feature, which was shown eminently in Christ, the source of humility and its perfect model⁷⁴. Furthermore, in the light of his concept of *Christus totus*, it becomes even more evident that the believer, as an obedient member

⁶⁷ "Humilis ueni, humilitatem docere ueni, magister humilitatis ueni; (...) qui mihi adhaeret, humilis erit, quia non facit uoluntatem suam, sed Dei" (AUGUSTINE, *Tractatus in Euangelium Ioannis* 25,16, CCL 36, p. 257). "Humilitatis enim magister est Christus, qui humiliavit semetipsum, factus oboediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis" (*Ibid.* 51,3, p. 440). Cf. also *Ibid.* 25,19, p. 259.

⁶⁸ "Doctor itaque humilitatis uenit non facere uoluntatem suam, sed uoluntatem eius qui misit illum" (*Ibid.* 25,18, p. 258). "Doctor itaque humilitatis Christus..." (*Id.*, *De sancta uirginitate* 31,31, CSEL 41, p. 269). See O. SCHAFFNER, *Christliche Demut. Des Hl. Augustinus Lehre von der Humilitas* [Cass. 17], Würzburg, 1959, pp. 83-135).

⁶⁹ AUGUSTINE, *De fide et symbolo* 4,6, CSEL 41, p. 9.

⁷⁰ "Deus propter te humilis factus est. Puderet te fortasse imitari humilem hominem, saltem imitare humilem Deum" (*Id.*, *Tractatus in Euangelium Ioannis* 25,16, p. 257). Cf. *Ibid.* 55,7, p. 466.

⁷¹ "Via humilitatis huius aliunde manat; a Christo uenit. Haec uia ab illo est, qui cum esset altus, humilis uenit" (*Id.*, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 31, s. II,18, CCL 38, p. 239).

⁷² "La humildad en el pensamiento de san Agustín tiene un carácter de permanencia. No es un mero acto. Es un modo continuo de existir que responde a una raíz ontológica" (J. L. AZCONA, *La doctrina de la humildad en los «Tractatus in Ioan-nem»*, in *Augustinus* 17 [1972] 27-45; 113-154; 255-288, p. 113).

⁷³ "Tibi autem non dicitur, Esto aliquid minus quam es: sed, Cognosce quod es. Cognosce te infirmum, cognosce te hominem, cognosce te peccatorem; cognosce quia ille iustificat" (AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 137,4,4, PL 38, c. 756).

⁷⁴ See O. SCHAFFNER, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-138; I. W. A. JAMIESON, *Augustine's Confessions: The Structure of Humility*, in *Augustiniana* 24 (1974) 234-246; A. VERWILGHEN, *Le Christ Jésus, source de l'humilité chrétienne* (Phil. 2,6-8), in A.-M. LA BONNARDIÈRE (ed.), *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, Paris, 1986, pp. 427-437; A. COSTA, *El camino de la humildad en las Enarraciones sobre los salmos de san Agustín*, in *Cuadernos monasticos* 22 (1987) 23-41.

of the body, cannot but pursue the same humility that characterizes Christ-the-head⁷⁵.

If humility is an inborn virtue in every Christian, the virgins, who are consecrated to God in a special manner, must deepen their awareness of it. This was made plain in the treatise that Augustine advised Demetrias and her mother to read, the *De sancta uirginitate*. In it, while repeatedly praising the state of virginity, the Bishop of Hippo was also frequently at pains to warn over and over again against the danger of pride⁷⁶. Maintaining one's virginity is a great good (*magnum bonum*) which comes from God. However, those who have embraced it must also be careful not to let it be ruined by pride (*ne superbia corrumpatur*)⁷⁷. In fact, if only God can guard and protect virginity (which is his gift), and if God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4,8.16), then it follows that love is also the guardian of virginity, and that same love finds its dwelling-place in humility⁷⁸. A proud virgin stands in stark contrast to the true meaning of her *propositum*. In that regard, Augustine affirmed clearly that a married but humble person is in a better position to serve as a witness to the Christian faith than a proud virgin⁷⁹.

Furthermore, according to Augustine, true humility corresponds to a state of "spiritual infancy" or "poverty of spirit", that same state that Jesus proclaimed to be a Christian beatitude and which uniquely gives access to the kingdom of God⁸⁰: "Who are the poor in spirit? The humble, those who tremble at God's words, who confess their sins, and rely on no merits or righteousness of their own. Who are the poor in spirit? Those who when they do anything good,

⁷⁵ "Princeps tuus humilis, et tu superbus? Caput humile, et membrum superbum? Absit. Non vult esse de corpore capitis humilis, qui amat superbiam" (AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 354,9,9, *PL* 39, c. 1568).

⁷⁶ "Non solum ergo praedicanda est uirginitas, ut ametur, uerum etiam monenda, ne infletur" (Id., *De sancta uirginitate* 1,1, *CSEL* 41, p. 236). The theme of humility being exalted in connection with virginity comes back over and over again in the treatise: cf. *Ibid.* 31,31–56,57, pp. 268–302 *passim*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 33,33, p. 273.

⁷⁸ "Non ergo custodit bonum uirginale nisi Deus ipse, qui dedit, et Deus caritas est. Custos ergo uirginitatis caritas; locus autem huius custodis humilitas" (*Ibid.* 51,52, p. 297).

⁷⁹ "Non dubito praeferre humilem mulierem virgini superbae" (Id., *Sermo* 354,9,9, *PL* 39, c. 1568). And again: "Et audeo dicere, coniugalem agentes vitam, si tenent humilitatem, superbis castis meliores sunt" (*Ibid.* 354,4,4, c. 1565).

⁸⁰ "*Talium est enim regnum coelorum [Mt 19,14], humilium scilicet, hoc est, spiritualiter parvulorum. (...) Humilitatem illam loquor, quae non vult perituris rebus excellere, sed aeternum aliquid veraciter cogitat, quo non suis viribus, sed adiuta perueniat*" (*Ibid.* 353,2,1, *PL* 39, c. 1561).

they praise God; when they do wrong, they accuse themselves”⁸¹. By underlining humility as “spiritual infancy”, in conformity to his doctrine of the sovereignty of grace, Augustine distinguishes his view from the concept of humility generally shared by the Church Fathers. The latter, in fact, preferred to follow Paul in his description of “infancy” as a stage in life prior to obtaining the full perfection of manhood in Christ (cf. *e. g.*, Eph 4,12-13; Col 1,28)⁸². Augustine is of course aware of Paul’s negative emphasis on spiritual infancy, but he is able to masterly join together the Apostle’s exhortation to be infants in regard to evil but adults in thinking (cf. 1 Cor 14,20) with the Gospel teaching on infancy as a sign of true humility (cf. Mt 11,25; 18,2-5.10-14; 19,14), and not necessarily equivalent with immaturity (*fatuitas*)⁸³. It follows that spiritual infancy/humility is the prerequisite of and the foundation for perfection. The acquisition of the latter, through virtue and wisdom, constitutes (to use a metaphor employed by Augustine but also employed by Biblical authors) the edifice which is built upon the foundation: “For, in order that what is being built might be completed, the building is added, the foundation is not removed”⁸⁴.

Moreover, in Augustine’s eyes, it is paramount that humility be closely interwoven with obedience. In fact, the creature’s reliance on God’s providence and her humble submission to God’s commandments find their natural expression in obedience. Just as humility is considered the foundation upon which perfection can be sought and built, so too is obedience regarded as the *maxima uirtus*,

⁸¹ “Qui sunt pauperes spiritu? Humiles, trementes uerba Dei, confitentes peccata sua; non de suis meritis, nec de sua iustitia praesumentes. Qui sunt pauperes spiritu? Qui quando faciunt aliquid boni, Deum laudant; quando mali se accusant” (Id., *Enarrationes in psalmos* 73,24, CCL 39, pp. 1020-1021). See also: Id., *De sermone Domini in monte* 1,3,10, CCL 35, pp. 7-8; *Sermo* 53,1, PL 38, cc. 364-365; *De sancta uirginitate* 32,32, CSEL 41, pp. 269-272.

⁸² In Paul’s eyes spiritual infants (νήπιοι) are those who are not firmly rooted in faith and are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men” (Eph 4,14). They behave childishly and are immature in their ability to discern the ways of God (cf. 1 Cor 13,11; 14,20). The majority of the Fathers equated “spiritual infancy” with a Christian life far removed from perfection (see M.-F. BERROUARD, *Enfance spirituelle*, I-III, in *DSP* 4/1 [1960] 682-705, cc. 698-703).

⁸³ “Proponitur enim pueritia ad imitandum humilitatem, et item proponitur pueritia ad cauendum fatuitatem” (AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 46,2, CCL 38, p. 530).

⁸⁴ “Fundamenti uero ideo est aptior similitudo, quia ut perficiatur quod struitur, additur aedificium, non subtrahitur fundamentum” (Id., *Tractatus in Euangelium Ioannis* 98,6, CCL 36, p. 580).

the source (*origo*), the mother (*mater*) and the guardian (*custos*) of all other virtues⁸⁵. It reminds the rational creature that while submission to the Creator is advantageous, the pursuit of one's own selfish will brings only pain and destruction. According to Augustine, obedience is the source and perfection of all justice (*iustitiae origo atque perfectio*). In fact, it is precisely here that we find the major difference (*magna distinctio*) between the first Adam, who by his disobedience brought death to us all, and the second Adam, Christ, who, through his obedience unto death, became the fountainhead of our salvation⁸⁶.

C. Other Pelagian errors.

After having stressed the importance of a virgin's humility and obedience, Augustine briefly summarizes the general tenets of the Pelagians' teaching. Firstly, he says that their definitions of grace are so ambiguous that when they speak of grace or of God's help they speak interchangeably of nature, of free will (as pertaining to the goodness of nature), of doctrine (divine revelation) and the remission of sins⁸⁷. Moreover, argues Augustine, even when the Pelagians are forced by the word of God to admit that one needs to pray in order not to fall into temptation (cf. Mt 26,41), they continue to interpret it in a way that makes something less than the means by which the will is strengthened and enabled to put into practice the truth of Christian revelation. On the contrary, they see prayer as an activity which facilitates man's knowledge of the truth in such a way that he can more easily learn what it is he has been asked to do⁸⁸. Jesus himself stands out as an *exemplum* for all who wish to live justly. Yet again, Augustine continues, there is evidence that the Pelagians regard knowledge as a sufficient means for both learning

⁸⁵ "Omnium origo materque uirtutum" (Id., *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum* 14,19, CCL 49, p. 50); "Sed oboedientia commendata est in praecepto, quae uirtus in creatura rationali mater quodam modo est omnium custosque uirtutum; quando quidem ita facta est, ut ei subditam esse sit utile; perniciosum autem suam, non eius a quo creata est facere uoluntatem" (Id., *De ciuitate Dei* 14,12, CCL 48, p. 434); "...oboedientia: quam uirtutem tamquam radicalem atque, ut dici solet, matricem et plane generalem..." (Id., *De bono coniugali* 24,32, CSEL 41, p. 228); Id., *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum* 2,21,35, CSEL 60, p. 107. Augustine considered obedience as the "Grundhaltung des Menschen" (K. S. FRANK, *Gehorsam*, in RAC 9 [1976] 390-430, c. 423).

⁸⁶ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 71,6, CCL 39, p. 975.

⁸⁷ Cf. Id., *Ep* 188,3,11-12, CSEL 57, pp. 128-129.

⁸⁸ *Loc. cit.*

and fulfilling the divine commandments. They do not clearly and directly acknowledge the need of God's love and God's *adiutorium*⁸⁹, a need which is acknowledged in the Bible by the sage who explicitly asked for the gift of chastity in order to avoid sin⁹⁰. He knew that chastity is a gift of God and that, as such, it could not be achieved through knowledge alone. On the contrary he asked to be endowed with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order to be able to practise the virtue of continence. Thus, Augustine concludes, in the writings of the Pelagians grace is not affirmed in the same way the apostle Paul did when he spoke of the need for man's works to be grounded in faith⁹¹ and his knowledge by charity (cf Rom 12,3; 1 Cor 8,1), viz. the infusion of love (*inspiratio caritatis*)⁹² that enables the believer to follow God's commandments.

3. Further implications

In Augustine's *Ep.* 188 it is possible to discern both an historical and a theological theme. This epistle reinforces the principle that the role of non-religious factors in a theological conflict should not be overlooked or underestimated. The clash between Augustinianism and Pelagianism is but one example of how secular factors were often exploited by both parties in the hope of gaining the support of aristocratic families whose influence might prove decisive for the acceptance of one religious opinion and the rejection of the other. As mentioned above, it is likely that Pelagius had enjoyed the support and the protection of, among others, the *gens Anicia*. This helps to explain the expression "small errors", used by Juliana in her letter to Augustine, especially if it was an attempt to shelter Pelagius from the "scrupulous" investigation of the bishop of Hippo and his friend Alypius, both of whom must have suspected that solid ties were still existing between the renowned ascetic and the *Anicii* were still in place. Jerome too, on the basis of the link he made between Origenism and Pelagianism, was on his guard against the *Anicii*. He felt that he had good reason to suspect that they were continuing to provide support for Pelagius, just as they had done previously for

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 188,3,12, p. 129.

⁹⁰ See *supra*, n. 61.

⁹¹ Augustine quotes Rom 12,3; 1,17; 14,23; Heb 11,6; 10,38; Gal 3,11; 5,6. Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 188,3,13, CSEL 57, p. 129.

⁹² Cf. *Ibid.* 188,3,13, pp. 129-130.

Rufinus⁹³. This, in its turn, would explain why, beyond the *politesse mondaine* which dominates the rhetorical tone of his letter to Demetrias, Jerome's reference to the "constraints" laid on him by Juliana's request (*in extorquendo*)⁹⁴ should *not* be regarded as rhetorical. Rather, they serve to express his uneasiness in redacting the letter against his will. Nonetheless, Jerome took advantage of the occasion to warn Demetrias against the risks of what he believed to be Origenism disguised as Pelagianism⁹⁵, and to speak out (although he did not mention the *Anicii* explicitly) against the dangers of any connection with the latter's party. On the other hand, it is likely that he was thinking of the *gens Anicia* when, in 415, in a letter to Ctesiphon, someone with "Pelagian" sympathies, he expressed his deep regret about that *sancta atque inlustis domus* welcoming heretics and even going so far as to support them materially, an action which, in his eyes, was the equivalent of accepting their teaching⁹⁶. Moreover, in his *Dialogi contra Pelagianos*, Jerome openly complained about the fact that Pelagius had dared to write to Juliana a letter offering spiritual advice to Demetrias⁹⁷, and it is highly probable that he was thinking of Proba and Juliana (and maybe also of Albina and Melania) when he complained that Pelagius was being protected by his *amazonae* (*sic!*)⁹⁸.

In the heat of the Pelagian controversy Juliana and her *domuncula* must have chosen in favour of pragmatism. Triggered by the concern for doctrinal uniformity (towards which the great aristocratic families moved after the sack of Rome in 410⁹⁹, largely for the sake of enhancing political stability) the *Anicii* ceased lobbying for the Pelagian movement, even though they continued to hold onto the friendship and esteem they had always felt for its leader. But there was something even greater behind this desire for doctrinal uniformity and political stability. In point of fact, the religious orthodoxy of the *gens*

⁹³ In the West the Origenist controversy pitted Rufinus against Jerome. The former was backed by the *Turcii*, the *Antonii*, and, most likely, by the *Anicii*. This last link can be inferred from a letter that John Chrysostom (who suffered considerably at the hands of the anti-Origenist party) sent to Juliana to thank her for having supported his cause in Rome: cf. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Ep.* 168, PG 52, c. 709.

⁹⁴ JEROME, *Ep.* 130,1, CSEL 56, p. 176. See *supra*, n. 32.

⁹⁵ Jerome makes the link between Origenism and Pelagianism by exhorting Demetrias to hold to the faith as expressed by Innocent I, a staunch anti-Pelagian (cf. *Ibid.* 130,16, p. 196).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 133,13, p. 260.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Id.*, *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* 3,14, CCL 80, p. 116.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 1,26, p. 33.

⁹⁹ "As for the great families who returned to their palaces in Rome, they would move with the times – towards uniformity" (P. BROWN, *Pelagius and His Supporters: Aim and Environment*, *cit.*, p. 191).

Anicia had always gone hand in hand with the splendour and the prestige of their worldly status, a factor that could never be underestimated and had always to be considered. Here lies the fundamental reason for Juliana's and, by extension, her household's impartiality in theological discussions and intrigues¹⁰⁰, and particularly for their alignment with the religious establishment once Pelagius had been officially condemned as heretic¹⁰¹. The proof of this lies in the fact that Juliana quickly came to be regarded as an "outstanding member of the Church"¹⁰², while her daughter Demetrias, whose virginity assigned her a particular relationship vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical hierarchy, became associated with pope Leo the Great in subsequent decades¹⁰³.

The above considerations make it probable that Juliana's reception of Augustine's *Ep.* 188 must have been respectful. Although this opinion cannot be documented, it seems clear that the letter must have inspired an attentive and thoughtful reading, even if it was not warmly received¹⁰⁴.

Also interesting is, from a theological point of view, Augustine's approach to the issue of humility and obedience compared to that of Pelagius. Augustine countered the view of the anonymous author of the *Ep. ad Demetriadem*, who betrays a fundamental optimism with regard to the capabilities of human nature, by reiterating his doctrine of grace. More particularly, he regarded obedience, i. e. man's humble submission to God, as the "mother of virtues" which uniquely makes possible commitments to God as well as any quest for perfection¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁰ "Justement fière de sa rectitude doctrinale, la *gens Anicia* ne se laissait embrigader dans aucune coterie: elle voulait planer impartiale au-dessus des intrigues" (G. DE PLINVAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216).

¹⁰¹ "Wichtige Anhänger des Pelagius sind bald nach der Verurteilung verstummt oder haben aus Furcht vor Repressalien mit Pelagius gebrochen" (O. WERMELINGER, *Rom und Pelagius*, *cit.*, p. 220).

¹⁰² "Singulare membrum ecclesiae..." (INNOCENT I, *Ep.* 15, *PL* 20, c. 518).

¹⁰³ Cf. L. DUCHESNE, *Liber Pontificalis*, T. I, Paris, 1886, p. 238; O. WERMELINGER, *Demetrias*, *cit.*, c. 291; C. and L. PIETRI (eds.), *Demetrias Amnia*, *cit.*, p. 546.

¹⁰⁴ Since no argument *e silentio* can ever be decisive one wonders how Clark is able to infer that Augustine's *Ep.* 188 jeopardized irremediably his relationship with Juliana and the *Anicii*. According to her, in fact, Augustine "killed a blossoming relationship with the Anician women through his hostility to Pelagian views" (E. A. CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy. The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton, 1992, p. 24).

¹⁰⁵ With regard to Augustine's labelling of obedience as the "mother of virtues", Colish writes: "His nomination of obedience as the mother of virtues (...) rather than Stoic prudence, Aristotelian justice, or Ambrosian temperance, reflects the deep misgivings of the later Augustine about man's ability to function as a moral agent *sui iuris*" (M. L. COLISH, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. II: *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, Leiden, 1990, p. 227).

His emphasis on the working of divine grace within the heart of the believer, and, more particularly, in the life of a consecrated virgin, highlights Augustine's skepticism regarding the ability of man to live in an ethically responsible way. The bishop of Hippo's position is further clarified by his emphasis on God's sovereign grace acting in a prevenient and unfathomable way with regard to the *liberum arbitrium* and the (*bona*) *uoluntas* of those He has elected to salvation.

As for Pelagius, his optimistic emphasis on *naturae bonum*¹⁰⁶ and the capabilities ensuing from man's *naturalis quaedam sanctitas*¹⁰⁷ was ultimately the result of his conviction that it was precisely man's ability to steer his own ethical course that guaranteed the authenticity of his belief. In the eyes of the ascetic Briton, it is the *operum confessio* and the *conuersationis effectus* that are most important, not the *eloquentiae pompa*¹⁰⁸. Pelagius would probably not have denied that humility also played a role in the area of Christian commitment. However, he probably would have understood this within the positive framework of man's natural ability. In fact, in exhorting Demetrias to pay special attention "to avoid false humility and to follow that true humility which Christ taught us and in which pride is not included, for many pursue the shadow of this virtue, few its truth [*Italics mine*]"¹⁰⁹, Pelagius stresses the autarchy of human capabilities. He believed that Demetrias' autonomous nature possessed naturally these virtues and that they allowed her to avoid false humility and to follow and pursue the true one without a special inner grace being added to that nature.

Obviously that the premises from which Augustine and Pelagius began were very different. While the Bishop of Hippo regarded humility as obedient submission to God engendered by interior grace, the ascetic Briton saw humility as a virtue that human beings naturally possess in themselves and which they can put into practice by

¹⁰⁶ Cf. PELAGIUS, *Ep. ad Demetriadem* 1-8, PL 30, cc. 16-25 *passim*.

¹⁰⁷ "Est enim (...) in animis nostris naturalis quaedam (ut ita dixerim) sanctitas: quae velut in arce animi praesidens, exercet mali bonique iudicium" (*Ibid.* 4, c. 19).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. ID., *In epistolam ad Corinthios* 4,19, PLS 1, c. 1193. See J.-M. SALAMITO, *Excellence chrétienne et valeurs aristocratiques: la morale de Pélagie dans son contexte ecclésial et social*, in G. FREYBURGER and L. PERNOT (eds.), *Du héros païen au saint chrétien. Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre d'Analyse des Rhétoriques Religieuses de l'Antiquité (C.A.R.R.A.), Strasbourg, 1^{er}-2 décembre 1995* (CEAug, Série Antiquité, 154), Paris, 1997, pp. 139-157, p. 141.

¹⁰⁹ "Praecipue tamen fictam humilitatem fugiens, illam sectare quae vera est, quam Christus docuit, humilitatem, in qua non sit superbia inclusa. Multi enim huius virtutis umbram, veritatem eius sequuntur pauci" (PELAGIUS, *Ep. ad Demetriadem* 20, PL 30, c. 36).

the free exercise of their will¹¹⁰. Christ is the *exemplum* for all believers as well as the model (*forma*) of perfect obedience to the will of God, i. e. the obedience unto death (cf. Phil 2,8)¹¹¹. Pelagius believed that by following Christ's example, humility and obedience can be consistently achieved through the active commitment of the individual believer who, being *capax gratiae*, can submit himself to God by his own initiative and thus gain both the temporal happiness and the eternal salvation that God has promised¹¹². For Pelagius, humility and obedience are virtues which belong to the domain of example and imitation. In this sense, their *ueritas* requires the seal of "visibility". That is why Pelagius (who must have also recognized that the *Anicii* occupied a prominent place in the Roman aristocratic world) compares Demetrias' consecration to a stage-play (*spectaculum*) whose authenticity must be seen and recognized by the world¹¹³, so that it will inspire others to imitate it.

Thus, Demetrias' consecration gave Augustine the occasion to focus on his theological (anti-Pelagian) position. For the bishop of Hippo, a consecrated life is the result of divine grace, the gift of God whose love both inspires and perfects it by bestowing on it, through the gifts of humility and obedience, the necessary spiritual strength. As a consequence, Augustine felt compelled to put the *Anicii* on guard against the Pelagian view, a view which, on the contrary, held that the *sanctum propositum* could be pursued through dedicated personal commitment and whose success was guaranteed by the fundamental goodness of human nature. Indeed, in Augustine's *Ep.* 188, the ascetic context which inspired the request for spiritual advice, was transformed into a pretext for a theological confrontation. More precisely, a pretext for Augustine "to transform Demetrias' ascetic calling into one more chapter in his theological controversy with Pelagius and his followers"¹¹⁴.

Donato OGLIARI OSB

¹¹⁰ According to Pelagius, humility is, above all, to be identified with "endurance" (*patientia*): cf. *loc. cit.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*, *In Epistolam ad Romanos* 5,12, *PLS* 1, c. 1136.

¹¹² "Ihrem Gehalt nach zielt die Demut auf die vollkommen Unterwerfung unter den Willen Gottes. Formal betrachtet erwächst diese Demut jedoch aus einem ich-bezogenen Bedürfnis, dem Verlangen nach ewigem Heil" (S. THIER, *Kirche bei Pelagius* [PTS, 50], Berlin-New York, 1999, p. 320).

¹¹³ "...et ad spectaculum uitae tuae totum consedis mundum" (PELAGIUS, *Ep. ad Demetriadem* 14, *PL* 30, c. 29). As Salamito writes, Pelagius "conçoit la sainteté comme une évidence qui éclate aux yeux de tous et suscite l'imitation; il accorde moins d'importance à la persuasion qu'à l'émulation" (J.-M. SALAMITO, *art. cit.*, p. 148).

¹¹⁴ A. S. JACOBS, *art. cit.*, p. 732, n. 63.