

**OPUS IMPERFECTUM**  
**AUGUSTINE AND HIS READERS, 426-435 A.D.**

BY

MARK VESSEY

On the fifth day before the Kalends of September [in the thirteenth consulship of the emperor Theodosius II and the third of Valentinian III], departed this life the bishop Aurelius Augustinus, most excellent in all things, who at the very end of his days, amid the assaults of besieging Vandals, was replying to the books of Julian and persevering gloriously in the defence of Christian grace.<sup>1</sup>

The heroic vision of Augustine's last days was destined to a long life. Projected soon after his death in the *Chronicle* of Prosper of Aquitaine, reproduced in the legendary biographies of the Middle Ages, it has shaped the ultimate or penultimate chapter of more than one modern narrative of the saint's career.<sup>2</sup> And no wonder. There is something very compelling about the picture of the aged bishop recumbent against the double onslaught of the heretical monster Julian and an advancing Vandal army, the extremity of his plight and writerly perseverance enciphering once more the unfathomable mystery of grace and the disproportion of human and divine enterprises. In the chronicles of the earthly city, the record of an *opus magnum sed imperfectum*; in the numberless annals of eternity, the perfection of God's work in and through his servant Augustine. . . .

As it turned out, few observers at the time were able to abide by this providential *explicit* and Prosper, despite his zeal for combining chronicle

---

<sup>1</sup> Prosper, *Epitoma chronicon*, a. 430 (ed. Mommsen, MGH, AA 9, 473).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Joseph McCabe, *Saint Augustine and His Age* (London 1902) 427: "Whilst the Vandals thundered at the walls Augustine was absorbed in his great refutation of the Pelagian bishop of Eclanum, Julian." Other popular biographers prefer the penitential vision of Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 31,1-2. On the modern *scholarly* representation of Augustine's last days, see James J. O'Donnell, "The Next Life of Augustine," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture*, eds. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (forthcoming), referring to the classic work of P.R.L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London 1967).

and theology,<sup>3</sup> was not among them. For those active in the textual dissemination of Christian dogma, Augustine's death was an epochmaking event. For the West, it marked the end of one of the most decisive literary and doctrinal careers since St. Paul's and the beginning of a period of corresponding theological uncertainty. We should not suppose, however, that Augustine's contemporaries were caught entirely unprepared when he died. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that the critical importance of this writer's death had been recognized well in advance of the event, and by no-one more clear-sightedly than the writer himself.

The portrait of Augustine as an old man looking back has been memorably drawn by Peter Brown.<sup>4</sup> My concern here is rather with Augustine as an old man looking forward, not to the vision of God he had long desired, but to the future circumstances of his fellow Christians, especially Christian readers, in *this* world, he himself having left it. How did Augustine and those under his influence prepare for the "post-Augustinian" era in Latin Christian literature? To what extent did his later writings, and the commissions he received, take account of the imminent demise of the author? How did his readers, sympathetic or critical, adjust to the new reality of his now never-to-be-extended literary oeuvre? How, in turn, did they begin to adjust that oeuvre to their own ends? The present essay follows a trail of readerly reactions to and constructions of the *opus Augustinianum* through the late 420s and into the early 430s, beginning with Augustine's own.<sup>5</sup>

The acts of an extraordinary meeting of the clergy and people in the *Basilica Pacis* at Hippo in September 426 record the bishop's appointment of the presbyter Eraclius to serve as his eventual successor and, in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. RA. Markus, "Chronicle and Theology: Prosper of Aquitaine," in *The Inheritance of Historiography*, eds. C. Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman (Exeter 1986) 31-43, repr. in his *Sacred and Secular: Studies on Augustine and Latin Christianity* (Aldershot 1994). Prosper's *Chronicle* is remarkable for its incorporation of notices derived from Augustine's catalogue of heresies, the *De haeresibus*, the last chapter of which describes the errors of the Pelagians. The next entry in the *Chronicle* after the record of Augustine's death refers to the Council of Ephesus at which "Nestorius with the heresy named after him, and many Pelagians, who were supporting a dogma related to their own, [were] condemned."

<sup>4</sup> *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London 1967) 408 ff.

<sup>5</sup> The omission of Possidius I shall make good elsewhere; see, meanwhile, my "Conference and Confession: Literary Pragmatics in Augustine's 'Apologia contra Hieronymum'," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993) 175-213 at 175-179, where I suggest that "Possidius' simplified and systematized account of the principles of Augustinian *doctrina* can serve as a basis for theorizing Christian literary activity in late antiquity" (177).

meantime, as his *locum tenens* for the conduct of routine diocesan affairs. It was an arrangement Augustine had tried unsuccessfully to implement some years earlier, and on which he now insisted. Henceforward, for at least five days of every seven, Eraclius would handle pastoral and judicial matters, leaving the bishop free for intellectual labor. "Let no-one envy me my leisure," Augustine told the assembled company, "for it is full of business."<sup>6</sup>

Medieval hagiographers not unreasonably supposed that Augustine's hard-won sabbatical was to be spent on the *Retractationes*. Had he been left to his own devices, it is possible that more of it would have been devoted to that task, and that we should now have the revisions of his letters and sermons as well as of the major books. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to regard all Augustine's other literary undertakings of those last four years as distractions from the main task of reviewing his past production. As a work that anticipates the objections of critics and seeks to impose criteria for the subsequent reception of his oeuvre, the *Retractations* is the most obviously "pre-posthumous" of Augustine's later writings. But it is by no means the only text of this period that both inscribes and, as it were, preemptively overwrites the death of the author. Its twin guiding principles—that Augustine's works should be read with an eye to their original order and context, and that the reader's understanding should advance with (and beyond) the author's<sup>7</sup>—are implicit in much else that he wrote around that time, as indeed they already are in much that he had written earlier. Even if we set aside the *De civitate Dei* (begun in 412, but not completed until 426/7), itself a massive work of recapitulation and revision, there remain the "second edition" of the *De doctrina christiana* (complete in four books), the projected two books *De haeresibus*, and the *Speculum*, all works which—with the somewhat earlier *Enchiridion*—may be seen as interlocking members of a textual bridge designed to carry Latin readers over the rift between the *saeculum Augustinianum* and the succeeding age.<sup>8</sup> Some of Augustine's later "anti-Pelagian" writings, I suggest, may also usefully be viewed in this perspective. Whereas the tracts against Julian, written at a rhythm dictated by the latter, retain to the last the air of business the author would finish

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 213,6 (CSEL 57,378).

<sup>7</sup> Note especially *Retr.* 1, prol. 3 (CCSL 57,6): "quicumque ista lecturi sunt, non me imitentur errantem, sed in melius proficientem. Inveniet enim fortasse quomodo scribendo profecerim, quisquis opuscula mea ordine quo scripta sunt legerit. Quod ut possit, hoc opere quantum potero curabo, ut eundem ordinem noverit."

<sup>8</sup> Othmar Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris 1969) 361 ff., with the table, 472-477, provides a detailed chronology.

if he could and then have die with him, another, less polemical set of treatises seems aimed at a readerly community for which he would make long-term provision. It is with those works and their readers that the following pages are mainly concerned.

*Florus of Hadrumetum: The Reader and the Author*

Shortly before Easter 426 a little embassy of monks from Hadrumetum arrived in Hippo on urgent business to the bishop.<sup>9</sup> Their monastery was in uproar. On a recent visit to Uzalis, one of the brethren, Florus, had made a copy of an anti-Pelagian treatise ascribed to Augustine and sent it back to the community. As some of the monks construed it, the argument of this work left no room for free will in the actions for which human beings were divinely judged. They were outraged. Surely, they said, Augustine had never held such a doctrine; the work could not be his. On his return Florus had staunchly upheld what he took to be the author's position. Tempers flared. An alarmed abbot called on local experts for help. Evodius, bishop of Uzalis, replied in a short letter urging prayerful reflection and a broadly Augustinian theology of grace. A presbyter named Januarianus wrote more punctiliously to the same effect. Another, Sabinus, appeared in person to interpret the controversial treatise.<sup>10</sup> All to no avail. The champions of free will insisted on taking the matter up with Augustine himself. Scarcely knowing what to do or think, still less what to write to the bishop of Hippo, the abbot had finally let two of them go.

Events such as these reveal the long-term hazards of the propaganda campaign mounted a decade earlier by Augustine and his allies against Pelagius, Caelestius, and their party. That "Great War" now belonged to

---

<sup>9</sup> For the theological issues involved in this and subsequent phases of the so-called "semi-Pelagian" controversy, see now Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, NAPS Patristic Monograph Series 15 (Macon [Georgia] 1996). A summary account may also be found in Dunstan O'Keefe, "The *Via Media* of Monastic Theology," *Downside Review* 112 (1994) 264-283, 113 (1995) 54-73, 157-174. My narrative for this section is based on Augustine, *Epp.* 214-216 (including 215A, printed as a prefatory addendum to Goldbacher's edition in CSEL 58). *Ep.* 217, to Vitalis, is further evidence of the author's concern for the proper reception of his works: "[R]ogavi deum et . . . adhuc rogo," it begins, "ut litteras meas nec aspernantes sumas et salubriter legas" (CSEL 57,403).

<sup>10</sup> *Ep.* 216,3 (CSEL 57,398). The letters of Evodius and Januarianus are printed in PLS 2,331-341.

history,<sup>11</sup> but the textual munitions used to win it and secure a fragile peace still lay scattered around, fused and liable to go off if not handled with care. Veterans of the earlier hostilities, like Evodius, were naturally circumspect. Others less well informed, like the monks of Hadrumetum, risked being hoist by their own reading. In the present case, they needed to know that Augustine's letter of 418 A.D. to the Roman presbyter Sixtus (the text copied by Florus) had been written against those "new heretics," the Pelagians. That is what Augustine told Abbot Valentinus, as he set about making this corner of the war zone safe for non-combatants.

From the outset of his dealings with the African monks, Augustine seems to have grasped the paradigmatic quality of their situation. Others could come to grief as they nearly had, on this or any similarly complex theological question. A single hyperactive reader in a Christian community had brought confusion on the rest, quite possibly through no fault of his own. The visitors from Hadrumetum blamed Florus. The bishop of Hippo suspends judgment: Florus may have failed to understand the text in question (*aut . . . non intellegit librum meum*) or been misunderstood (*aut forte ipse non intellegitur*).<sup>12</sup> We are reminded, not for the last time in documents from the final phase of Augustine's career, of those earlier essays on human understanding and its textual instruments, the *De magistro*, *De doctrina christiana*, and *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>13</sup> The new controversy underlined an old point: that all knowledge of the truth, howsoever mediated, was God-given. Already by the mid-390s Augustine's epistemology had received the imprint of his theory of grace. Thirty years later his message was the same. *Da quod iubes* ("Grant what you command"), the prayer that had scandalized Pelagius when he read the *Confessions*,<sup>14</sup> was as applicable to the intellectual as to the moral life. In the quest for understanding, whether of Augustine's writings or of the Holy Scripture to which all Christian writing was ancillary, the interpreter relied on a human intellect illuminated by God.<sup>15</sup> "Reread

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Augustine*, 399.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 214,6 (CSEL 57,385).

<sup>13</sup> Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1996), is now the fullest discussion, reviewed at length by James J. O'Donnell and the present writer in *Bryn Mawr Reviews* (on-line) [19]96.9.1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae* 20,53 (PL 45,1026), referring to *Conf.* 10,29,40 f.

<sup>15</sup> The point is fundamental to Augustine's sense of his oeuvre as a Christian writer. See already *Ep.* 27,4 (to Paulinus of Nola, 396 A.D.), appositely cited by James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols. (Oxford 1992) l.xxxi, and contextualized in my "Conference and Confession" (cited above. n. 5) 188-189.

that book carefully—*repetite assidue librum istum*,” Augustine says of his Letter to Sixtus, “and if you understand, give thanks to God. And where you do not understand, pray that you may; for God will give you understanding.”<sup>16</sup>

“Read, and pray for understanding” was a piece of advice Eraclius might have offered any puzzled reader of Augustine, without disturbing the bishop’s peace. It was the advice Evodius had already given in his letter to Abbot Valentinus.<sup>17</sup> Before long, it would be the only general advice anyone could give. For as long as he lived, however, Augustine continued to strive by every practical means to ensure that the understanding he had been granted by God was available through him—that is, in the majority of cases, through his writings—to others. His first letter to Valentinus is a holding measure; the two itinerant monks wanted to be back in their monastery for Easter and there was no time for him to explain the intricacies of the debate they had blundered into. Or so he thought. Then, as they were about to leave, another of their company arrived, apparently with permission for them to prolong their stay. The letter just written would now be kept, to be sent with a second as part of the covering matter for a new work written specially to deal with the issues raised, entitled *On Grace and Free Will*. And there would be more besides. In the days after Easter, Augustine went over a series of canonical documents with his guests: the letters of the anti-Pelagian councils of Carthage and Milevis (416) and of the five African bishops to Pope Innocent; the latter’s replies; the letter of another African council (417) to Pope Zosimus; that pope’s *Epistula tractoria* addressed to all the bishops of the Roman Empire; a further statement of the African bishops. All these texts, together with his Letter to Sixtus, a treatise of Cyprian on the Lord’s Prayer, and the new work *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, were the objects of a paschal seminar conducted for the benefit of his visitors. In future, they would be available for study by the community at Hadrumctum: *haec omnia et in praesentia legimus cum ipsis et per eos misimus vobis*, Augustine tells the abbot.<sup>18</sup> By a process of collation, contextualization, and supplement

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 24,46 (PL 44,911).

<sup>17</sup> Evodius, *Ep. ad abbatem Valentinum* (PLS 2,333): “Legant ergo sancti Dei maiorum dicta . . . et quando non intellegunt, non cito reprehendant, sed orent ut intellegant, petant ut accipiant, quaerant ut inveniant, pulsant ut aperiatur eis” (cf. Augustine, *Conf.* 13,38,53, with O’Donnell’s commentary *ad loc.*). He adds that the will to understand (“velle bene intellegere”) is itself God-given, and alludes to the key Augustinian proof-text, 1 Corinthians 4:7. Januarianus toes the same line (PLS 2,341).

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 215,2 (CSEL 57,389). For identification of the canonical documents, no longer all extant, see Otto Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius: Die theologische Position der*

that was at once archival and authorial, Augustinian and para-Augustinian, the treatise procured by Florus had been securely enmeshed in a larger ensemble, a kind of hypertextual apparatus *de gratia et libero arbitrio* created by Augustine to make intelligible not only the doctrines at issue but also the textual forms in which they had been progressively published. With some adjustments, the method is essentially that of the contemporary *Retractations*.

Even then Augustine did not desist. He asked that Florus be sent to him, and in due course Florus came. Valentinus may have been a little overwhelmed by the library of texts brought home from Hippo, embarrassed too by his earlier reluctance to endorse the Letter to Sixtus. Eager to make amends, he now gave fulsome assurances of the community's fidelity to Augustine's teaching. Florus, who carried the abbot's letter to Hippo, also brought tidings of new dissension in the monastery, perhaps provoked by a cursory reading of the *De gratia et libero arbitrio*. If the fallen human will was powerless for the good until enabled by divine grace, then—it was now being asked—what right had any human being to reprimand another for his moral failings? To that question, so potentially subversive of monastic discipline, Augustine replied in a treatise *De correptione et gratia* ("On Admonition and Grace"), which Florus could have taken back to Hadrumetum in the latter half of 426. The last work listed in the author's *Retractations*, it begins with a summons to readerly *retractatio*. If the monks of Hadrumetum—or, by extension, any future community of readers—wished to derive full profit from the writer's previous work *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, let them read it through again, noting in particular what divine (as opposed to human) authority was adduced in support of its arguments.<sup>19</sup> The logic of this prefatory admonition could hardly be more constraining. To read Augustine right was to discover the sense of God's biblical word . . . and rightly to construe that sense, one should reread Augustine!

---

*römischen Bischöfe im pelagianischen Streit in den Jahren 411-32, Päpste und Papsttum 7* (Stuttgart 1975), 147-148.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *De correptione et gratia* 1,1 (PL 44,917): "Non itaque opus est omnia identidem retractare, quae sufficienter vobis pleno libro disputata transmisimus [i.e., the *De gratia et libero arbitrio*] quem quomodo susceperitis, rescripta indicant vestra [*Ep.* 216]. Verumtamen semel lectum nullo modo arbitremini satis vobis innotescere potuisse. Si ergo fructuosissimum habere vultis, non vos pigeat relegendo habere notissimum, ut diligentissime sciatis quibus et qualibus quaestionibus solvendis atque sanandis, non ibi humana sed divina occurat auctoritas, a qua recedere non debemus, si volumus pervenire quo tendimus."

Contradictory as they may at first appear, Augustine's reminder of the primacy of divine authority and his insistence on the authority of popes and councils as warrants of his own teaching are twin features of a pedagogy adapted to a world in which human discernment can never be perfect but, divinely aided, may nevertheless catch glimmers of a transcendent truth. Convinced that the institutions of the church were part of God's provision for the elect on their earthly pilgrimage, Augustine set a high value on the pronouncements of bishops and other notable Christian teachers. In the course of controversy with the Pelagians, indeed partly in response to their tactics, he had acquired a theory of conciliar authority and a habit of recourse to the quasi-conciliar agreement of accredited Christian writers.<sup>20</sup> These were important developments for Latin theology and Christian literary practice alike. By the mid-420s, to judge from the replies to Abbot Valentinus, awareness of issues of specifically *textual* authority was not uncommon among the better informed members of the African clergy. Evodius warns sternly against calling into question the written works of "holy teachers of the church" and is horrified by the possibility that the monks might reject the decrees of a "plenary" council. Let them recall the scriptural admonition, "Ask your father and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you" (cf. Deuteronomy 32:7).<sup>21</sup> Januarianus uses the same language, referring to unnamed Catholic authors as "holy fathers, most famous and distinguished teachers of the churches of God," and urging Valentinus to reserve their texts for monks fit to read them.<sup>22</sup> Commonplace as such concerns were to become in the decades after the Council of Ephesus

---

<sup>20</sup> After Pierre Batiffol, *Le catholicisme de saint Augustin*, 5th edn. (Paris 1929) and German Martíl, *La tradición en san Agustín a través de la controversia pelagiana* (Madrid 1943), see Karl-Heinrich Lütcke, "Auctoritas" bei Augustin (Stuttgart 1968) 142-46; Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius* (cited above, n. 18) 264 ff.; Hermann Josef Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee der Alten Kirche* (Paderborn 1979) 68-102; Giovanni Maschio, "L'argomentazione patristica di s. Agostino nella prima fase della controversia pelagiana," *Augustinianum* 26 (1986) 459-479; Ernst Dassmann, "'Tam Ambrosius quam Cyprianus' (c. Iul. imp. 4,112). Augustinus Helfer im pelagianischen Streit," in *Oecumenica et Patristica: Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag*, eds. Damaskinos Papandreou, Wolfgang A. Bienert, and Knut Schäferdiek (Stuttgart 1989) 259-268. Augustine's textual conciliarism reaches its peak in the *Contra Iulianum* of 422 A.D.

<sup>21</sup> (PLS 2,333-334) where the singular "father" (for the biblical plural) refers most naturally to Augustine himself. For an important recurrence of this biblical verse in a related context, see n. 66 below. Not all contemporary readers were so ready to pronounce Augustine a Catholic *tractator*; for a more sceptical stance, see the text cited at n. 89.

<sup>22</sup> (PLS 2,340-341).

(431 A.D.), they are rare enough in Latin documents of this date to deserve notice.<sup>23</sup> While neither Evodius nor Januarianus mentions Augustine by name, both were plainly conscious of his unique authority on the matter in hand and of the new demands that he was laying on Christian readers, even as he sought to make their way smooth.

*Prosper of Aquitaine: The Reader and the Work*

The *De correptione et gratia* arrived in Southern Gaul with “unlooked-for timeliness,” probably no later than 427.<sup>24</sup> In Prosper’s view, it should have silenced the local critics of Augustine’s teaching. In the event, it seems only to have made them more vocal. These alleged “enemies of grace”—monks and ascetically minded bishops from Marseilles, Arles, and the surrounding region—included some of the bishop of Hippo’s most exacting and resourceful readers. Although direct evidence of their textual practices is hard to find, the writings of Prosper supply material for a tentative comparison of their methods and his.<sup>25</sup>

Before calling on Augustine to intervene personally in the Gallic debate, Prosper had been busy on his behalf, selecting from his work and summarizing his arguments for the local audience.<sup>26</sup> If people would only attend

<sup>23</sup> Vessey, “The Forging of Orthodoxy in Latin Christian Literature: A Case Study,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996) 495-496.

<sup>24</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Augustinum* (= Augustine), *Ep.* 225,2 (CSEL 57,456): “insperata opportunitate.” For the date, see Owen Chadwick, “Euladius of Arles,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1945) 200-205. As noted by R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990) 178, Prosper’s letter indicates “that some anxiety, perhaps controversy had preceded the arrival of [Augustine’s treatise] in Gaul.”

<sup>25</sup> This section and the next are designed to complement R.A. Markus, “The Legacy of Pelagius: Orthodoxy, Heresy and Conciliation,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge 1989), 214-234, esp. 217-220. See now also Éric Rebillard, “Quasi funambuli: Cassien et la controverse pélagienne sur la perfection,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994) 197-210.

<sup>26</sup> Although it is impossible to say how much of Prosper’s vast oeuvre as an epitomator of Augustine dates from before 427, we should not assume that he awaited either the author’s death or the outbreak of controversy to begin excerpting and adapting his writings. On his Augustinian *Sententiae*, see Rudolf Lorenz, “Der Augustinismus Prosper’s von Aquitanien,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 73 (1962) 217-252, and Vittorino Grossi, “La recezione ‘sentenziale’ di Agostino in Prospero di Aquitania: Alle origini delle frasi sentenziali attribuite ad Agostino,” in *Traditio Augustiniana: Studien über Augustinus und seine Rezeption*, Festgabe W. Eckermann (Würzburg 1994) 123-40. Further references and discussion in Weaver, *Divine Grace* (above, n. 9) 117-54. For a preliminary treatment of the

to what had been written by this “special patron”<sup>27</sup> of the Catholic faith, he claimed, they would feel the overwhelming force of his biblical teaching.<sup>28</sup> To encourage them to do so, Prosper reproduced what he took to be the inner “form” of the master’s discourse in new outward forms,<sup>29</sup> including verse.<sup>30</sup> Aside from Augustine’s own preposthumous recasting of his work, these writings of his Gallic disciple are our first clear instance of the “post”-Augustinian elaboration of an *opus Augustinianum*. In devising them, Prosper was as faithful to the author’s habits of doctrinal composition as he meant to be to his doctrine of grace. Appealing for a sequel to the *De correptione et gratia*, he affirmed the utility of writing “even what has been written.”<sup>31</sup> Augustine was bound to agree. “To write the same things to you does not irk me,” he replied, quoting the Apostle (Philippians 3:1).<sup>32</sup> Irsome as it was to see the biblical testimony to God’s grace still being resisted, that would not deter him from adding to the store of books and letters he had written on the subject. For who could be sure that God had not ordained *this* text and *these* intermediaries as means of grace to some of the elect?<sup>33</sup>

Inattention to Augustine’s texts was hardly a besetting sin of his ascetic critics in Gaul. Although careful not to publish their dissent while he was living, they read him minutely. “There is a rumour,” reports Prosper in an epigram, “that a certain person is slandering (*carpere*) the books of the eloquent old man Augustine and composing a work against him.”<sup>34</sup> *Carpere*

---

literary method of Prosper’s “Augustinianism” in these and other works such as the *Epigrammata* and *Expositio Psalmorum*, see Vessey, “Ideas of Christian Writing in Late Roman Gaul” (unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis 1988) 152-219, partly resumed here.

<sup>27</sup> *Ep. ad Augustinum* 1 (CSEL 57,455).

<sup>28</sup> *Ep. ad Rufinum* 4,5 (PL 51,80A), with a slap at those who covertly opposed his teaching “inter multas collationes,” probably an allusion to Cassian and his party. Confirmation of the early date of the *Epistula ad Rufinum* is offered by Françoise Vincl, “Une étape vers l’affirmation du salut universel: Prosper d’Aquitaine: *Lettre à Rufin*,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 90 (1995) 367-395, who finds in it no trace of the *De correptione et gratia*.

<sup>29</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 3 (CSEL 57,459): “Et cum contra eos scripta beatitudinis tuae validissimis et innumeris testimoniis divinarum scripturarum instructa proferimus ac secundum formam disputationum tuarum aliquid etiam ipsi, quo concludantur, adstruimus. . . .”

<sup>30</sup> His *Peri achariston* or *Carmen de ingratis* in 1002 hexameters is usually taken to be an early work.

<sup>31</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 9 (CSEL 57,468).

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1,1 (PL 44,959).

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1,2 (PL 44,961).

<sup>34</sup> Prosper, *Epigramma in obtrectatorem Augustini* 1-2 (PL 51,149A). Cf. the plea in an

can mean “to excerpt” and that sense may also be intended here. If at one stage Prosper could complain that the opposing party did not produce the passages it found objectionable,<sup>35</sup> by the time he and a certain Hilary wrote to Augustine the situation was becoming clearer. The Massilians<sup>36</sup> might disagree with the African’s theology at certain points, but they were not about to reject his work en bloc. Rather, they hoped to use one Augustinian text to drive out another. Finding in such recent treatises as the *Contra Iulianum* (422) and *De correptione et gratia* a doctrine of predestination which seemed to devalue their own spiritual enterprise, they appealed from them to Augustine’s earlier understanding of grace and free will, expressed in works from the period before the Pelagian crisis. Not only were other catholic teachers on their side, they asserted, so was the “more ancient” Augustine.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine’s response to this novel kind of “prescription”<sup>38</sup> can be read in his two books *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiae* (“On the Predestination of the Saints” and “On the Gift of Perseverance”).<sup>39</sup> There are two key points. First, one must consider the context of particular utterances; these Gallic readers needed to know the circumstances in which each of Augustine’s works had been written. Secondly, due allowance had to be made for progressive refinements—even for major adjustments—in

---

another such poem, “Quae concepta fovet promat, quae parturit edat” (PL 51,151A), repeated complaints of secret dissent in the *Ep. ad Rufinum*, and the triumphant words of the *Contra collatorem*, 2,1 (PL 51,218A): “Scripta . . . sunt, et auctoris sui editione publicata,” referring to Cassian’s *Conferences*.

<sup>35</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Rufinum* 18,19 (CSEL 51,88B): “proferendo atque explicando libros.”

<sup>36</sup> I use this as a blanket term for the Gallic critics of Augustinian predestination, the opinions of whom are said to have been in the air “Massiliae vel etiam aliquibus locis in Gallia” (Hilary, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 2 [CSEL 57,469]). Propopographical precision is difficult in this matter: for a recent attempt, see Ralph W. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Washington [D.C.] 1989), 122-40, amplified in his “For Specialists Only: The Reception of Augustine and His Teachings in Fifth-Century Gaul,” in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine, Presbyter Factus Sum*, eds. Joseph T. Lienhard, Earl C. Muller, and Roland J. Teske (New York 1993), 29-41.

<sup>37</sup> Hilary, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 3 (CSEL 57,471): “hoc non solum aliorum catholicorum testimoniis sed etiam sanctitatis tuae disputatione antiquiore se probare testantur.” The works cited for this purpose included Augustine’s *Ep.* 102 (ca. 409), the *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos* (394) and the *De libero arbitrio* (388-394/5).

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae* 11,26 (PL 45,1008): “agebam in libris de libero arbitrio, unde isti nobis praescribendum putant.”

<sup>39</sup> Regarded by the original addressee, and presumably by the author, as a single work *De praedestinatione sanctorum*: Prosper, *Responsiones ad excerpta Genuensium* praef. (PL 51,187A).

his thought over the years. The challenge of Pelagius had forced Augustine to express himself more clearly on certain issues. Long before that providential event, however, he had come to see the error in his early belief that an individual could initiate his or her own religious conversion by an unaided act of will.<sup>40</sup> Here again, as in the encounter with Florus and his fellows of Hadrumetum, we recognize the literary apologetics of the *Retractions*, a work which Hilary asked to see as soon as it was ready and which, though still incomplete, was evidently sent to Gaul with the two books *De praedestinatione sanctorum* in 428/9.<sup>41</sup> But there is now a new emphasis on the internal logic or economy of the Augustinian “work” as a whole.

Augustine’s understanding of the truth had advanced as he wrote. As vigilant readers of his books, the Massilians should be equally careful to learn from his errors and corrections.<sup>42</sup> The point was later twisted by Prosper in a polemical sense,<sup>43</sup> but his opponents’ faith in Augustinian “antiquity” was not so easily shaken. Shortly after Augustine’s death, Prosper and Hilary obtained an endorsement of his teaching from Pope Celestine.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to the bishop of Marseille and his regional colleagues, the pope urged an end to controversy, recalling that his predecessors in the Roman see had always counted Augustine “among the best masters.”<sup>45</sup> Since he omitted, however, to mention any specific works or dogmas, the Massilians were still free to draw a line between the anti-Pelagian positions approved by Innocent and Zosimus, with which they had no quarrel, and the later outworkings of Augustine’s doctrine of predestination, which had never received either papal or conciliar sanction.<sup>46</sup> Prosper insisted that the distinction was false. There was nothing in this author’s later works that could not be found more or less clearly expressed in his earlier writings against Pelagius. Everything he had written on the subject of grace and free will since ca. 412, if not since 396, had been imbued with the same spirit, shaped by the same inner “form” of discourse. If they admitted the ortho-

<sup>40</sup> See especially *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 3,7-4,8; 9,17; *De dono perseverantiae* 9,23; 11,26-12,30; 20,52-21,55.

<sup>41</sup> Hilary, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 10 (CSEL 57,479). Cf. *De dono perseverantiae* 11,27.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 4,8; *De dono perseverantiae* 21,55.

<sup>43</sup> In his *Responsiones ad excerpta Genuensium* (PL 51,191B), complaining of those “qui curaverunt omnes sensus ipsius [sc. Augustini] indagare, [sed] noluerunt cum eius eruditione proficere.”

<sup>44</sup> Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius* (above, n. 18) 246-249.

<sup>45</sup> Celestine, *Ep. ad episcopos Galliarum* (“Apostolici verba”) 2,3 (PL 50,530A).

<sup>46</sup> Prosper, *Contra collatorem* 21,3 (PL 51,272B); his adversaries consider the pope’s approval to apply only to Augustine’s earlier writings.

doxy of the earlier work, as they professed to, then the Massilians had no choice but to accept the later as well.<sup>47</sup> The Augustine whose opinions carried dogmatic authority did not expire prematurely in 418.

Prosper makes this argument at the close of a polemical work *Contra collatorem*, directed against the thirteenth *Conference (collatio)* of John Cassian. Because the list of papal supporters which he adduces there runs all the way to Sixtus III, successor to Celestine in July 432, the treatise is usually dated to that year or later. We should note, however, that the passage in question forms a kind of coda to the work, and that another list of authorities included early in the main text mentions no Roman pontiff later than Zosimus.<sup>48</sup> That earlier list draws on a dossier of papal and conciliar decrees against the Pelagians which Prosper seems to have had at his disposal since ca. 426.<sup>49</sup> Already in the *Letter to Rufinus* he referred to decisions of the eastern bishops, of the Roman see, and of the African councils; the “new critics” of Augustine should know that his teaching had been universally approved.<sup>50</sup> The appeal to geographical universality is further strengthened in the poem *De ingratiss* (“On the Graceless, or Ungrateful”) through references to Bethlehem (Jerome), Constantinople (the patriarch Atticus), Ephesus and Sicily.<sup>51</sup> Prosper is in no doubt about the value of normative documents. “We have the texts,” is his cry: *scripta manent*.<sup>52</sup> The main novelty of the *Contra collatorem* lies in the decision to quote documents verbatim, a procedure more fully developed in the pseudo-Celestinian *Chapters on Divine Grace and Free Will*.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Prosper, *Contra collatorem* 21,3 (PL 51,273A), rejecting the distinction between *antiquitas* and *novitas* in Augustine’s own teaching: “*idem doctrinae spiritus . . . eadem praedicationis forma*.” Cf. Georges de Plinval, “Prosper d’Aquitaine interprète de saint Augustin,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958) 347: “Il proclame avec force l’unité qui inspire toute l’oeuvre augustinienne.” Prosper builds on Augustine’s self-defence at *De dono perseverantiae* 21,55.

<sup>48</sup> Prosper, *Contra collatorem* 5,3.

<sup>49</sup> Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius* 149 reviews the documentation.

<sup>50</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Rufinum* 3,4 (PL 51,79B): “*novi censores*.” Cf. Augustine, *Retr.* 1, prol. 1 (CCSL 57,5): “*ut . . . quod me offendit velut censorio stilo denotem*.” Jerome had already adapted the language of textual criticism to the orthography of Christian doctrine: Vessey, “Forging of Orthodoxy” (above, n. 23).

<sup>51</sup> Prosper, *De ingratiss* 33-71, the latter two names designating places from which Pelagian heretics had been expelled.

<sup>52</sup> Prosper, *De ingratiss* 84 (PL 51,101A), referring to the acts of an African council.

<sup>53</sup> This compilation of papal texts, associated in the manuscript tradition with the letter of Celestine to the Gallic bishops (above, n. 45), was convincingly attributed to Prosper by D.M. Cappuyns, *Revue Bénédictine* 41 (1929) 156-170.

Our evidence suggests, then, that Prosper launched his campaign *pro Augustino* on the basis of a body of corroborative, para-Augustinian material similar to that deployed by Augustine himself down to ca. 426 (and presumably deriving from Hippo), but was forced by his opponents to develop additional techniques of argument. The direct appeal to Rome ca. 431 and the systematic citation of papal documents in subsequent works may have been inspired in part by the tactical ultramontanistism of Augustine's critics.<sup>54</sup> Harder to deflect, indeed never properly addressed by Prosper, was the Massilian claim that Augustine's teaching contradicted a prior "patristic" consensus.<sup>55</sup> Rather than assent to an unfamiliar and uncongenial exegesis of biblical passages on grace and free will, these readers put their faith in an interpretation supported by the writings of reputable Christian authors besides Augustine. Implicit in their style of argument was the assumption that, in every case where certainty mattered, there would emerge a single, commonly held opinion. To establish that opinion textually was the work of another kind of *retractatio* or review.<sup>56</sup> In the treatise addressed to Prosper and Hilary Augustine went to considerable lengths to supply evidence of patristic support for his views and to explain why it was not more abundant, thereby implicitly underlining the principle of textual conciliarism invoked in his earlier writings against Pelagius and Julian.<sup>57</sup> In the process, it seems, he confirmed certain Gallic theologians in a mode of research to which they were already professionally disposed.

#### *Vincent of Lérins: The Reader and the Text*

Among the few named adversaries of Prosper was a certain Vincent, deviser of a terrifying digest of purportedly Augustinian dogmas, such as "That God created the greater part of humanity in order that he might work

<sup>54</sup> According to the preface to the ps.-Celestinian *capitula*, these critics professed to accept only doctrines "quae sacratissima beati apostoli Petri sedes . . . sanxit et docuit" (PL 51,205A). Cf. Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 32.

<sup>55</sup> Prosper, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 2 (CSEL 57,455): Augustine's teaching alleged to be "contrarium . . . patrum opinioni et ecclesiastico sensui."

<sup>56</sup> Hilary, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 8 (CSEL 57,477): the Massilians resort to "libri . . . [eorum] quorum est in ecclesia auctoritas"; Prosper, *Ep. ad Augustinum* 8 (CSEL 57,467): "retractatis priorum de hac re opinionibus, paene omnium par invenitur et una sententia."

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 14,27-28; *De dono perseverantiae* 19,48-50. Prosper's appeal to the "sensus omnium tractatorum" at *Contra collatorem* 9,5 (PL 51,238C) is justified by a single quotation from Ambrose.

their perpetual ruin.”<sup>58</sup> On the principle of not multiplying Vincents beyond necessity, this one should be identified with a monk of Lérins who at the same period produced an anti-heretical treatise known as the *Commonitorium*, and a set of excerpts from Augustine’s trinitarian and christological writings.<sup>59</sup> Links between the monastic communities of Lérins and Marseilles were close, and there are important methodological and ideological convergences between Cassian’s *Conferences* and the *Commonitorium*.<sup>60</sup> Cassian may have refrained from overt disagreement with the bishop of Hippo, but the manner of his claim to offer a (non-Augustinian) doctrine of grace and free will in conformity with the opinions of “all the catholic fathers” matches the reported tactics of the Massilian party too closely for it to be possible to regard him simply as a bystander to the debate. Not without reason was Prosper mistrustful of the “conference” as a mode of theological discourse, at least as practiced in his own milieu. Faithfully as he might transcribe and adapt Augustine’s writings, he was at a disadvantage when competing with the vivid presences conjured by the man he called the *Collator*.

In the simulated desert dialogue of his thirteenth *Conference*, composed ca. 426, Cassian made it appear that ideas about divine aid and human effort were best transmitted in the practical, oral instruction of a monastic disciple by his master; a person’s assurance of holding the catholic faith lay in the existential continuity of ancient and widely attested habits of life, not in the empty words of theological controversy.<sup>61</sup> A similar emphasis

<sup>58</sup> Prosper, *Pro Augustino responiones ad capitula obiectionum Vincentianarum* cap. 3 (PL 51,179C).

<sup>59</sup> Pace William O’Connor, “St. Vincent of Lerins and St. Augustine,” *Doctor Communis* 16 (1963) 123-157, who disputes the identification made by Hugo Koch, “Vincenz von Lerin und Gennadius,” in *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 31.2 (Leipzig 1907) 43-47. The Augustinian *Excerpta* were first edited by José Madoz in 1940. Vincent’s texts are cited here in the edition of R. Demeulenaere (CCSL 64).

<sup>60</sup> Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee* (above, n. 20) 149-170 (“Der Konzilsbegriff des Vincenz von Lerin”), esp. 164 ff.; Agostino Pastorino, “Il concetto di ‘tradizione’ in Giovanni Cassiano e in Vincenzo di Lerino,” *Sileno* 1 (1975) 37-46. The authors independently conclude that Vincent’s concepts of tradition and unity in doctrine are analogous to those expounded by Cassian in his monastic treatises and the *Contra Nestorium*. See further Vessey, “Ideas of Christian Writing” (above, n. 26) 223-237.

<sup>61</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* 13,18 (CSEL 57,467): “Per quod evidenti ratione colligitur ab his qui non loquacibus verbis, sed experientia duce vel magnitudinem gratiae vel modulum humani metiuntur arbitrii. . . . Et idcirco hoc AB OMNIBUS CATHOLICIS PATRIBUS definitur, qui perfectionem cordis non inani disputatione verborum, sed re atque opere didicerunt. . . . Si quid sane versutius humana argumentatione ac ratione collectum huic

on personal discipleship, oral transmission, and sanctity of life marks the construction of orthodoxy in his polemical treatise *Against Nestorius* (430), a work whose genre nevertheless allowed the citation of written *testimonia*, including two in this case from the writings of Augustine, “bishop of Hippo Regius.”<sup>62</sup> Oral conference and textual collation were thus assimilated, but in such a way that special value still attached to the living word of a teacher.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, Augustine was a past master of the conference, especially the kind involving collation of texts. Now a community of readers in Gaul was inserting his texts into a collective doctrinal oeuvre or universal Text (capital “T”) that was at once residually oral and as firmly shaped by writing as his own published *opus*. After Cassian, Vincent is that community’s most able spokesman.

According to Prosper, those who drew up lists of objectionable “Augustinian” positions on grace and predestination did so in order to distract their readers from proper scrutiny of the *libri Augustini*.<sup>64</sup> Less pejoratively, we may say that the Massilians’ purpose was to circumscribe the part of this author’s literary output that would henceforth be considered doctrinally normative. The tergiversations of modern scholarship notwithstanding, Vincent’s stake in that enterprise is beyond reasonable doubt.<sup>65</sup> By setting the problem of the reception of Augustine’s oeuvre in the context of a larger theory of the *writerly* elaboration of Christian dogma, he carried his Gallic and other readers decisively into the post-Augustinian era.

---

sensui videtur obsistere, vitandum magis est quam ad destructionem fidei provocandum.” These two conferences belong to a set dedicated to the abbot of Lérins and a monk associated with that community. See also Conrad Leyser, “‘Lectio Divina, Oratio Pura’: Rhetoric and the Techniques of Asceticism in the *Conferences* of John Cassian,” in *Modelli di santità, modelli di comportamento*, eds. G. Barone et al. (Rome 1994) 79-105.

<sup>62</sup> Cassian, *De incarnatione Domini contra Nestorium* 7,24-31 at 27. Marie-Anne Vannier “Jean Cassien a-t-il fait oeuvre de théologien dans le *De incarnatione Domini*?” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 66 (1992) 119-132 observes the congruence with Vincent’s methods in the *Commonitorium*.

<sup>63</sup> Note the terms of the final appeal to the authority of John Chrysostom, “qui communis mihi ac vobis [sc. Nestorio] magister fuit, cuius discipuli atque institutio sumus” (CSEL 17,390). In the next sentence Nestorius is referred to John’s writings.

<sup>64</sup> Prosper, *Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula obiectionum Gallorum calumniantium* praef. (PL 51,156A).

<sup>65</sup> Although now in need of modification in places, José Madoz, *El concepto de la tradición en san Vicente de Lerins: Estudio histórico-crítico del Commonitorio*, Analecta Gregoriana 5 (Rome 1933) and *Excerpta Vincentii Lirinensis*, Estudios Onienses 1.1 (Madrid 1940) are still the best guides.

Despite the initial affectation of an orality reminiscent of Cassian's *Conferences*, the *Commonitorium* is a studiously chirographic work.<sup>66</sup> Combining recent data from the acts of the anti-Nestorian Council of Ephesus with documentation on the theological controversies of the previous two centuries, the author constructs a narrative of the progressive *textual* formulation of Catholic dogmas in which special importance is attributed, first, to conciliar creeds and, secondly, to statements derived from comparison of the written opinions of reputable Christian teachers. Of the three criteria posited for the determination of orthodoxy (ubiquity, antiquity, unanimity), only the first appears even potentially applicable without recourse to documents.<sup>67</sup> In practice, the search for true doctrine turns out to be a search for textual harmony, whether ready-made in a formula like the Nicene Creed or newly brought to light by the Catholic excerptor-compiler.<sup>68</sup> To illustrate the process of patristic collation,<sup>69</sup> Vincent refers to a dossier of texts presented at the Council of Ephesus.<sup>70</sup> (We have seen, however, that Massilian readers did not wait for Cyril of Alexandria to give them lessons in this new art.) Turning from events at Ephesus to take a general view of the issue of heretical innovation, he then quotes a document whose specific reference, though omitted, would have been fresh in the minds of his first readers. By an ingenious soliciting of Pope Celestine's letter of ca. 431, he encourages the suspicion that it was Augustine's Gallic supporters, not his critics, who preached a novel doctrine of predestination.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee* 155: "Die Eigenart der Anwendung [of the principle of referring to 'tradition' as a guarantee of orthodoxy] besteht, kurz gesagt, darin, daß Vinzenz eine *schriftliche* Quelle neben, um nicht zu sagen, über der Schrift postuliert." Cf. Vessey, "Peregrinus against the Heretics: Classicism, Provinciality and the Place of the Alien Writer in Late Roman Gaul," in *Studia Ephemeridis "Augustinianum"* 46 (Rome 1994) 530-565, esp. 553-5. Note the citation of Deut. 32:7 ("Interroga patres tuos . . .") at *Commonitorium* 1,1, quickly assimilated to a literate context. For an earlier application of the same verse, see n. 21 above.

<sup>67</sup> Yet in order to invoke the faith of the church as a whole ("quod ubique creditum est"), Catholic opponents of the Donatists referred to written texts: *Commonitorium* 6,3-10.

<sup>68</sup> On the paradigmatic importance of the Nicene Creed for Vincent, see Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee* 157 f. This text is central to his discussion of the criterion of antiquity.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 3,4 (CCSL 64,150): "operam dabit, ut conlatas inter se maiorum consulat interrogetque sententias."

<sup>70</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 29-30, citing a set of patristic *testimonia* read out by Cyril during the first session. Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee* 159, notes that Vincent gives this document a prominence it did not have at the council, at the expense of the Nicene Creed. See also n. 76 below.

<sup>71</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 32,4-7 (CCSL 64:193), concluding: "Ergo haec fuit beati

Given what is known about the Gallic habit of reading Augustine's later anti-Pelagian works *against* the concerted testimony of earlier Catholic authors, it is notable that Vincent's one other extant production (apart from the anti-Augustinian *Objections* quoted by Prosper) consists of a set of excerpts from the African's writings on the Trinity and Incarnation, offered as an authoritative statement of Catholic doctrine, and including passages from the (two-book) *De praedestinatione*! As an ensemble—more exactly, as a concise instantiation of the imagined universal Text of Christian orthodoxy—these excerpts are said to represent the sense of Holy Scripture and the teaching of the ancients; in collecting them into a book, Vincent spoke as if for all the holy fathers, albeit in the words of one man.<sup>72</sup> What is striking about this contention is that it flatly contradicts a principle enunciated in the *Commonitorium*, namely that proof of consensus (outside the decrees of church councils) required the production of multiple witnesses.<sup>73</sup> How is the inconsistency to be explained? Vincent himself implies that since Augustine had consulted many previous writers, his own works might be regarded—on certain topics—as models of doctrinal *collatio*.<sup>74</sup> Although not explicitly envisaged in the *Commonitorium*, this possibility would have been attractive to a dogmatist who, like others of his and the next generation, seems to have yearned for a trinitarian-christological formula that would take account of doctrinal developments that had supervened since the (late fourth-century) consecration of the Creed of Nicaea.<sup>75</sup> The Council

---

Caelestini beata sententia, ut non vetustas cessaret obruere novitatem, sed potius novitas desineret incessere vetustatem”; Madoz, *El concepto* 79-83. Madoz goes too far, however, in reducing the *Commonitorium* as a whole to “un panfleto contra San Agustín” (89). The opposite error—that is, to deny that the work is marked *in any way* by opposition to Augustine's teaching on predestination—is represented by O'Connor (above, n. 59) 194 ff. and Elie Griffe, “Pro Vincentio Lerinensi,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 62 (1961) 26-32.

<sup>72</sup> Vincent, *Excerpta* 1 (CCSL 64,202): “ipsum beatae memoriae sanctum Augustinum, immo per eum Christi potius et ecclesiae antiquam et universalem fidem audiamus loquentem”; 10 (231): “licet unius sacerdotis verbis omnium sanctorum patrum sensu locuti esse videamur.”

<sup>73</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 3,4 (CCSL 64,150): “non unus aut duo tantum”; 27,4 (186): “multorum . . . magistrorum”; 28,7 (187): “velut quodam . . . magistrorum concilio.”

<sup>74</sup> Vincent, *Excerpta* 1 (CCSL 64,202): “Ait namque: Omnes quos legere potui qui ante me scripserunt de Trinitate quae Deus est, divinorum librorum . . . catholici tractatores hoc intenderunt secundum scripturas docere . . . [= *De Trinitate* 1.4.7].”

<sup>75</sup> For an instance of post-Nicene credal drafting from Vincent's own milieu, known to both Augustine and Cassian, see the *Libellus emendationis* of Leporius (CCSL 64,111-23). Credal summaries are particularly favoured by Gennadius of Marseille in his *De viris illustribus*.

of Ephesus had produced no such text.<sup>76</sup> The *Commonitorium* gestures towards it in language that consistently evokes the progressive consolidation, unfolding, and artistic enhancement of dogma.<sup>77</sup> By stringing together the “jewels” of Augustine’s teaching as a charm against the errors of Arius, Photinus, Apollinarius and Nestorius,<sup>78</sup> Vincent may have hoped to advance a collective work of literary-dogmatic art, the end of which would be an expression of the essence of the Catholic faith attributable to no one individual, except by accidental association, because truly universal—an abridgement *in modum symboli* of the orthodox Text.<sup>79</sup>

Evidence that Vincent, like the emperor Theodosius II, called on Augustine posthumously to contribute to the work of the Council of Ephesus does nothing to weaken the inference that the *Commonitorium* was in some sense a product of Massilian efforts to limit the receivable part of his oeuvre. On the contrary, representing Augustine’s works (down to the last) as a rich hoard of trinitarian and christological *sententiae* was a shrewd way of excluding

---

<sup>76</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd edn. (London 1975) 486: “for the Fathers of 431 Nicaea provided the really authoritative christological formula, the simple wording of which was once again no more than a re-presentation of the apostolic faith and the tradition of the primitive church.” Cf. Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee* 244. In fact, the council explicitly forbade the drafting of new credal formulae.

<sup>77</sup> After explaining the errors of Nestorius, Photinus and Apollinarius, Vincent embarks at *Commonitorium* 13,5 on an essay in trinitarian-christological definition: “Sed operae pretium est, ut id ipsum [i.e., the orthodox dogma] etiam atque etiam distinctius et expressius enucleemus” (CCSL 64,164). Note also *Commonitorium* 23,1-13, where the development (*profectus*) of religious doctrine is successively compared to the growth of a living body, the fruition of plants, and the finishing of a work of art. It is the last analogy (“ut prisca illa . . . dogmata processu temporis excurrentur, limentur, poliantur” [CCSL 64,179]) that most clearly implies a role for human *tractatores* and *collatores* working in a literary medium; cf. Madoz, *El concepto* 129-130; Marc Lods, “Le progrès dans le temps de l’Eglise selon Vincent de Lérins,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 55 (1975) 384-385. The miniaturism of Vincent’s verbal aesthetic accords with his insistence on concise forms of dogmatic expression, e.g., at *Commonitorium* 23,19 (CCSL 64,180): “magnam rerum summam paucis litteris comprehendendo.”

<sup>78</sup> Vincent, *Excerpta* 10 (CCSL 64,231): “Haec sunt quae de libris sancti Augustini in unum velut opusculum sparsim collecta digessimus. Quas ego non tam capitula quam gemmas potius et margaritas quasdam appellaverim.” Cf. *Commonitorium* 22,6 (CCSL 64,177): “pretiosas divini dogmatis gemmas exculpe, fideliter coapta, adorna sapienter, adice splendorem gratiam venustatem.”

<sup>79</sup> For discussion of his role in the preparation of the so-called Athanasian Creed, see Madoz, *Excerpta* 65-90; J.N.D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London 1964) 116-119. “The conclusion is inescapable,” writes Kelly, “that Lérins was the cradle of the creed” (119).

their other contents from consideration.<sup>80</sup> For all their interest in concise forms of dogmatic expression, Gallic authors of this period show little inclination to expand the credal format to accommodate doctrines of grace and free will. Like Pelagius, Caelestius, and other creative theologians of the Theodosian Age, they preferred to leave such matters outside the orbit of the faith required in a profession of orthodoxy.<sup>81</sup> Augustine took the opposite view. Summarizing Catholic dogma and his own teachings in the *Enchiridion* (ca. 422), he combined orthodox doctrine of the nature of God with an exposition of the regime of divine grace, in a manner unknown to the prior tradition of creed-making.<sup>82</sup> The author of the *Commonitorium* interprets the “rule of faith” in a more restricted sense, implicitly ruling out the disputed articles on grace and predestination.<sup>83</sup> As honorary draftsman to the Council of Ephesus in the *Excerpta*, Vincent’s Augustine forfeits his claim to the precarious textual consensus constructed in the *Contra Iulianum*.

It is possible to discern in the *Commonitorium* the shadow of an even more radically reductive approach to Augustine’s work as a publishing theologian. Like Tertullian, Vincent interprets Galatians 1:8 as a ban on every kind of doctrinal innovation. “Why then,” he has an imaginary interlocutor ask, “does God so often allow outstanding churchmen to preach novelties?” The perils of allegiance to a trusted master who succumbs to error are developed at length, in a passage for which Tertullian offers no hint.<sup>84</sup> Nestorius, Photinus, Apollinarius, Origen, and Tertullian himself are cited<sup>85</sup> as instances of teachers who for a time flourished conspicuously in the faith but fell “at the end” into heresy.<sup>86</sup> Vincent’s handling of the cases of Origen and Tertullian reflects the controversy thirty years earlier between Jerome and Rufinus over the alleged heretical interpolation of Origen’s writings. Now as then the issue was one of textual credibility.<sup>87</sup> Rufinus’ attempt to

---

<sup>80</sup> Gennadius of Marseilles, writing under Vincent’s influence thirty years later, lists only three works in his notice on Augustine (*De viris illustribus* 39); one of them is the *De Trinitate*, another a *De incarnatione Domini* (a florilegium?). See also n. 92 below.

<sup>81</sup> Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius* 137-141.

<sup>82</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. from the 3rd German edn. by J. Millar (London 1898) 5.222-240.

<sup>83</sup> Markus, “The Legacy of Pelagius” (above, n. 25) 220. *Commonitorium* 28,16 (CCSL 64,189): the purpose of the Council of Ephesus was “to fix the rule of faith,” supposedly by recourse to patristic texts. Cf. *ibid.* 29,9-10; 30,6.

<sup>84</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 10; cf. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 4.

<sup>85</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 11; 17-19.

<sup>86</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 17,1 (CCSL 64,170): “ad extremum.”

<sup>87</sup> Vessey, “The Forging of Orthodoxy” (above, n. 23).

save the texts of Origen had ended ingloriously. Tertullian's final error "detracted from the authority of his otherwise trustworthy writings."<sup>88</sup> If there was a practical lesson to be drawn from these precedents, Vincent refrains from stating it. A train of thought that would leave Augustine's works subject to the kind of censure already placed on Origen's was too disturbing to be followed to its logical conclusion, even by so rigorous a critic as the Lerinian *commonitor*.<sup>89</sup>

It has been well said that "[b]y the preparation of the *Retractations* and by Possidius' authorship of the *Life of Augustine* and his compilation of the little pamphlet we call his *indiculum* of Augustine's writings, Augustine left this world with a more secure claim on future readers' attention than any other writer of his age."<sup>90</sup> With that posthumous authorial claim went a twofold challenge, spelled out in the *Retractations* and, as we have seen, implicit elsewhere. First, there was the invitation to readerly comprehensiveness and imitation. Students of Augustine were to treat the ensemble of his writings as an emergent, contextually determined whole, each part of which, duly considered, marked a passage in the author's personal quest for divine understanding. To read Augustine attentively was to mime and recapitulate his own prayerfully laborious "progress" towards God.<sup>91</sup> That was a stiff task, as early readers were quick to point out.<sup>92</sup> But it was less than the sum of what was asked of them. For they were also incited to readerly openness and collaboration, as (most plainly) at the close of his last finished work.<sup>93</sup> Nobody should mistake the "Complete Works" for the

<sup>88</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium* 18,5 (CCSL 64,173), quoting Hilary of Poitiers.

<sup>89</sup> A contemporary reader, the Spaniard Consentius, was less cautious. See his letter of ca. 419 to Augustine (= Augustine), *Ep.* 12\*,11-12 (ed. Divjak), with Norbert Brox, "Consentius über Origenes," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982) 141-144 and Carol Quillen, "Consentius as a Reader of Augustine's *Confessions*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 37 (1991) 100-101.

<sup>90</sup> James J. O'Donnell, "The Authority of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991) 7-35 at 16, a lecture to which this article owes more than can be conveyed by citation.

<sup>91</sup> From a different perspective, Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (above, n. 13) offers a masterly account of this process.

<sup>92</sup> On the difficulty, if not impossibility, of reading all that Augustine had written, see already Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 18,19; Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 39; Eugippius, *Ep. ad Proban* 2,19; Isidore of Seville (PL 83,1109). The thought perhaps owes something to Jerome, *Ep.* 33.5 (on Origen), echoed by Vincent, *Commonitorium* 17,7.

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae* 24,68 (PL 45,1034): "Qui legunt haec, si intelligunt, agant Deo gratias: qui autem non intelligunt, orent ut eorum ille sit doctor interior, a

whole truth. To read Augustine attentively was to be alert to the inner promptings of the true Teacher and thus in a position to correct both him and his writings in the light of a hypothetical higher Text.

Measured against so elevated an ideal of collective or communal textuality, the shifts of readers like Florus, Prosper, Vincent and other Massilian critics of the late 420s and early 430s are bound to seem a little less than inspiring. Yet many of their concerns and strategies, as traced in these pages, were similar to those of Augustine himself, if not visibly derived from his work. In their zeal for the collation and reproduction of potentially normative texts, as in their attachment to a real or fictionalized oral pedagogy, these readers—as Christian writers, if not always as theologians—were natural heirs to the *Confessions* and *Retractions*. If there is a single major difference to be observed between their manner of proceeding and Augustine's as his own literary executor, it is, as we might expect, a circumstantial one. Free of the burdens of high pastoral office, international reputation, and the necessity of answering a Julian of Eclanum, monastic and lay writers of the next generation could afford to economize where the bishop of Hippo had latterly been most prolific. No heroes, they were content to make a world—and work—for themselves within the expanding textual universe of Latin Christianity. They did so, in the first place, by assigning limits to the *opus Augustinianum*.<sup>94</sup>

The University of British Columbia  
 Dept. of English  
 #397-1873 East Mall  
 Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

---

cuius facie est scientia et intellectus. Qui vero errare me existimant, etiam atque etiam diligenter quae sunt dicta considerent, ne fortassis ipsi errent. Ego autem, cum per eos qui meos labores legunt non solum doctior verum etiam emendatior fio, propitium mihi Deum agnosco; et hoc per ecclesiae doctores maxime exspecto, si et in ipsorum manus venit, dignanturque nosse quod scribo." Vincent, *Commonitorium* 1,7 is careful not to be taken for one of the *doctores ecclesiae* of whom Augustine expected most.

<sup>94</sup> This paper has benefitted from the comments of members of Professor Peter Brown's Late Antique Seminar at Princeton University, where I had the opportunity to read a draft of it in February 1997.