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## Addendum

p. 32: Replace the sentence which reads: "In doing so, they become states of mind rather than 'perturbations,' 'appetites,' or 'diseases' of the body." With: "In doing so, they become compatible with the highest mental state of wisdom, rather than 'perturbations,' 'appetites' or 'diseases' provoked by the body."

n. 39 p. 33: Add: "Commenting on the significance of these passages, Marcia Colish also views Augustine's endorsement of the virtue of pain and sorrow as crucial to his effort to differentiate a Christian ethical psychology from Stoic teaching on *apatheia*; Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 2, *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 221-225."

n. 103 p. 50: After "Augustine also sheds tears in *Soliloquies 2.1* (PL 32:885)..." add: "and, as O'Donnell notes, in *De ordine* (CCSL 29) 1.8.22, 1.10.30 and in *Contra academicos* (CCSL 29) 2.7.18; Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. 2, James J. O'Donnell, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 157."

n. 104 p. 51: Add: "O'Donnell also draws textual connections between *Conf.* 13.12.13-13.13.14, *En. in Ps.* 41 and *Conf.* 4.4.9. In their baptismal nature and their invocation of Paul, O'Donnell connects these passages of book thirteen with the baptismal and revelatory book eight; O'Donnell in Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:362-65."

n. 115 p. 52: Add: "see also, O'Donnell in Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:462."

n. 24 p. 65: Substitute: "Celia Chazelle, *The Cross, the Image and the Passion in Carolingian Thought and Art* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985)" with "Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001)." And substitute the subsequent reference with "Chazelle, *Crucified God*, 4, 9-11."

p. 110 "1 Corinthians 3.1-2" should read "1 Corinthians"

p. 136 "John 7.38" should read "John"

n. 57 p. 123 After "some dispute amongst scholars" replace remaining note with: "In the mid-nineteenth century, Étienne-Michel Faillon attributed the manuscript to the Carolingian exegete, Rabanus Maurus, because of a fifteenth-century titular attribution: *Rabanus de Vita Mariae Magdalene* (Oxford, Magdalen College, MS 89 c. 1408). The idea of Rabanus' authorship has since been overturned by distinguished scholars such as the Bollandists, Paul Meyer, and Henri Leclercq; see Victor Saxer, "La 'Vie de sainte Marie Madeleine' attribuée au pseudo-Raban Maur, oeuvre claravaliennne du XIIe siècle," *Mélanges Saint Bernard* (Dijon, 1953), 409-410 cited in David Mycoff, introduction to *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha: A Medieval Biography*, trans. David Mycoff, Cistercian Studies, no. 108 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 7-8. In the mid-twentieth century the foremost scholar of the twelfth-century cult of Mary Magdalene, Victor Saxer, argued that the text is most likely Cistercian. In his recent edition and translation of the *Vita*, Mycoff shares Saxer's view of the text's probable Cistercian origin; Saxer, "La 'Vie'" in Mycoff, introduction, 8.

The earliest manuscript of the *VBMM*, which dates from the late twelfth century, was found at Clairvaux (Montpellier, Faculté de Médecine, MS I. Vol. 3) and subsequent early copies belonged to cistercian and franciscan monasteries. The predominately cistercian heritage of the manuscripts, Mycoff argues, while not demonstrating cistercian authorship, "does establish that Cistercians or those greatly influenced by cistercian spirituality (the Franciscans) played the major role in preserving and transmitting the work, that they were its primary audience, and that they considered it worthy of being included along with some of the masterpieces of Cistercian spiritual writing"; Mycoff, introduction, 8. Textual evidence of direct borrowings from the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux scattered throughout the *VBMM*, further suggest cistercian authorship. At the very least, they show, as Saxer put it, that the *VBMM* is "stamped with the spiritual doctrine of St Bernard" and was most likely "composed in a milieu pervaded by the spiritual teaching of the mystical doctor"; Saxer, "La 'Vie,'" 419, 420 quoted and translated in Mycoff, introduction, 9."

### Changes to Bibliography:

Substitute: Chazelle, Celia. *The Cross, the Image and the Passion in Carolingian Thought and Art*. Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985. with Chazelle, Celia. *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Add: \_\_\_\_\_ . Augustine. *Confessions*. Vol 2. James J. O'Donnell. *Commentary on Books 1-7*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. Colish, Marcia L. *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*. Vol. 2. *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985.

# **A Theology of Tears**

from Augustine  
to the Early Thirteenth Century

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Historical Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Monash University  
Australia  
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Fig. 1 Albrecht Dürer, *Christus als Schmerzensmann*, reprinted from Johan Eckart von Borries, "Christus als Schmerzensmann," *Bildhette der Staatlichen Kunsthalle Karlsruhe*, no. 9 (Karlsruhe, 1972), p. 9 fig 4.

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## *Abstract*

This thesis describes a theology in which the emotion expressed by tears is viewed as the key to a community united by bonds of love instead of by laws. It traces the importance of the “inner crucifixion” of tears within a mystical tradition that pursues the social vision of Paul, built around the distinction between merit and grace. It argues that the profound humanism reflected in spiritual understandings of tears from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries derives from an Augustinian “mystical morality” that was developed by Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, amongst others. It presents new interpretations of the mysticism of these three influential figures — Augustine, Anselm and Bernard — offering close readings which emphasise the relationship between theology and spiritual practice. Interpreting a twelfth-century Cistercian *Life* of Mary Magdalene and James of Vitry’s *Life* of the Beguine Marie of Oignies, it reveals how the new focus on incarnation, sacrament and maternal imagery is informed by the revived patristic theme that Christ’s suffering represents his loving communication. Through highlighting the interrelatedness of the moral and mystical significance of tears, this thesis demonstrates the fundamental social orientation of medieval mysticism and its roots in Augustinian and Pauline thought.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Catherine Opper

## *Acknowledgments*

For their particularly warm and generous enthusiasm for this project I thank Frances Oppel, Kate Rigby and Caroline Bynum. I also owe deep gratitude to the teachers who have most inspired me by their brilliance and unorthodoxy, including Robert Brentano, Randolph Starn, Charles Zika and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Family and postgraduate friends gave me blind loyalty, compassion and hope. They include: John Oppel, Jo Aitken, Kathy Lothian, Anne Taylor, Angus Nichols, Soe Tjen Marching, Catherine Egan, Caroline Spenser, and many other warm friends from the Monash Postgraduate Centre. For their support in the early days, I thank Val Campbell, Peter Howard, Alan and Martine Henry. My supervisor, Constant Mews, helped me revisit my argument and prose, which made the thesis clearer and more developed. Thanks to Paul Chandler and the Australian Carmelites for their support. Librarians at the Joint Theological Library of the United Faculty of Theology and at the Victorian State Library Arts Collection were exceptionally helpful. Robyn Horner read and commented on an early draft and Andrew Tudor helped with final layout. My deepest gratitude goes to Paul Smitz, who, as well as being a terrific reader and editor, constantly reminded me that I didn't know for sure that I couldn't do this until I had actually tried it.

## Abbreviations

- AASS     *Acta Sanctorum*. Antwerp and Brussels: Various publishers, 1643-1940. Reprint Brussels: Lebon, 1965. 68 vols.
- CCSL     *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954-.
- PG        *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*. Edited by J. P. Migne. Paris, 1857-66. 161 vols.
- PL        *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*. Edited by J. P. Migne. Paris, 1844-64. 221 vols.
- SAO       *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*. Edited by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt. 5 vols. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946-51.
- SBO       *Sancti Bernardi Opera*. Edited by J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot and H. M. Rochais. 8 vols. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-77.
- SC        *Sources chrétiennes*. Edited by Jean Daniélou et al. Paris: Cerf, 1940-.

## Titles of Augustine's works

- Conf.*            *Confessionum*
- De civ. Dei*     *De civitate Dei*
- De doct. Christ.*   *De doctrina Christiana de vera religione*
- Enarr. in Ps.*     *Enarrationes in Psalmos*
- Sol.*              *Soliloquiorum*
- De trin.*         *De trinitate*

*Titles of Anselm of Canterbury's works*

<i>CDH</i>	<i>Cur Deus homo?</i>
<i>De conceptu</i>	<i>De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato</i>

*Titles of Bernard of Clairvaux's works*

<i>SC</i>	<i>Sermones super Cantica canticorum</i>
<i>De dil.</i>	<i>De diligendo Deo</i>
<i>De gradibus</i>	<i>De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae</i>

*Other titles*

<i>Tusc. disp.</i>	<i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>
<i>VBMM</i>	<i>De vita Beatae Mariae Magdaleneae et sororis eius Sanctae Marthae</i>
<i>VMO</i>	<i>Vita Beatae Mariae Oigniacensis</i>

*A note on editions, translations and language usage:*

Generally, for medieval works I have cited edition and page number from the standard editions. The translations vary, and are my own only when no other attribution appears. The Latin given in the notes may be either exactly rendered in the main text, or it may be paraphrased. Occasionally, where I have briefly paraphrased a long passage, I have omitted the Latin from the note. I have cited edition and page number for classical works only when directly quoting from a translation. This applies mainly to the works of Plato and Cicero. All biblical references are to the Latin Vulgate.

Throughout this thesis, I use the male pronoun discriminately to reflect either the use of a gender-specific term in a text, or where I believe gender specificity is implied or assumed. In the cultural context of Augustine or Bernard of Clairvaux (and certainly of Cicero or Plato) a discourse which seeks to "recover" the emotions is framed by assumptions about masculinity. This dynamic is similar to the twelfth-century male "recovery" of a feminised *humanitas* analysed by Caroline Walker Bynum in: "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality"; "And Woman His Humanity" in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992).

## Introduction

After delivery, the baby's supply of oxygen from the mother is stopped. Circulation in the baby continues, and as the blood level of carbon dioxide increases, the respiratory centre in the medulla is stimulated. This causes the respiratory muscles to contract, and the baby draws its first breath. Since the first inspiration is unusually deep because the lungs contain no air, the baby exhales vigorously and naturally cries.<sup>1</sup>

This technical description of the physiology of the human baby's first cry, from a recently published medical textbook, offers a seemingly mechanical analysis of a phenomenon that has inspired profound reflection throughout the ages. Yet the phrases describing the stopping of oxygen supply from the mother, the stimulation of blood in the medulla, the contraction of muscles and the unusually deep inspiration suggest a more dramatic and significant sequence than the authors intended. A beautiful metaphor inheres in this physiology. Exiting the womb, the baby moves from one relationship of dependency to another, from the mother's supply of oxygen to an external source, and the transition is marked by the expression of a cry, the same cry that will punctuate all future experiences of pain and loss. To breathe on our own, to accept our dependence on life by the dramatic feat of the first, deep inspiration, is predicated on an experience of painful separation expressed in tears. If we do not weep, we cannot breathe and we would fail to make the transition from dependency on the mother's oxygen to a new dependence on life in the world.

The idea that feeling grief expresses the power of attachment is eloquently expressed by the moral philosopher, Raimond Gaita:

It is strange and sometimes it is mysterious, that other people can affect us as deeply as they do. Our sense of the reality of other people is connected with their power to affect us in ways we cannot fathom, as is revealed in the fact that our lives seem empty when we lose those we love, or, in a different way, in the destructive nature of certain dependencies. Although we often cannot fathom this power, we accept it as part of human life: if we are plunged into

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard J. Tortora and Nicholas P. Anagnostakos, *Principles of Anatomy and Physiology*, 6th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 947.

grief or despair because of it, we may hope that time will heal our suffering and that life will reassert itself in us.<sup>2</sup>

Revisiting these thoughts in a later essay entitled "Goodness Beyond Virtue," Gaita translates his former hope for the reassertion of life into a message about the renewal of love:

The power of human beings to affect one another in ways beyond reason and beyond merit has offended rationalists and moralists since the dawn of thought .... Such attachments, and the joy and the grief which they cause, condition our sense of the preciousness of human beings. Love is the most important of them.<sup>3</sup>

Gaita's association of a reassertion of life with the attachments that create a sense of love offensive to moralists reminds me of Saint Paul's ideal of "true life" as a society connected by bonds that transcend law. For Gaita, the depth of emotion experienced in grief suggests an alternative basis for human goodness than rational obedience to moral law. In this thesis, I shall explore a direction of medieval theology which views grief as the entry-point to an alternative morality based not on law but on love. In tears, medieval theologians saw the means to a uniquely human freedom. It is not the freedom of —

the Gods, who inhabit  
the lucid interspace of world and world,  
where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,  
where never falls the least white star of snow,  
nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,  
nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar  
their sacred everlasting calm!<sup>4</sup>

-- but the freedom that fulfils the potential of love that is proper to born, not to unborn, divine beings.

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<sup>2</sup> Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, Swansea Studies in Philosophy (London: Macmillan, 1991), 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (Melbourne: Text, 1999), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Tennyson, *Lucretius* 3.18-23; cited in A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 48.

*The Study of Tears*

Piroska Nagy, the author of the most comprehensive study to date on the significance of tears in medieval spirituality, has described Christian tradition as awash in a sea of religious tears.<sup>5</sup> Once limited to minor entries in encyclopaedia of Christian piety, the place of tears in medieval and early Christian spirituality earned its first substantial scholarly attention in work begun by Lot-Borodine in the mid-1930s and completed by Irénée Hausherr in the mid-1940s, which strove to retrieve and consolidate doctrine on *πενθος* — “spiritual grief” or compunction — from its deep and extensive roots within Eastern patristic, monastic and eremitic traditions.<sup>6</sup> The groundbreaking work of these scholars demonstrated the scope of the topic, revealing an eremitic and early monastic culture drenched in the sea of religious tears and a theological discourse on the spiritual significance of tears within the writings of all of the most famous fathers.<sup>7</sup> The author of the first study on the doctrine of compunction in the West, Sandra McEntire, aspired to “fill the lacuna left by Hausherr” by recovering an equally rich discourse on tears in Western monastic, theological and mystical traditions.<sup>8</sup> Dissatisfied with McEntire’s effort, and in response to her own assessment that “a history of the evolution of the concept and of the religious and social sense of its usage remains to be done,”<sup>9</sup> in 2000, Nagy presented her magisterial study of the development of doctrine on the “gift of tears” in Eastern and Western traditions from Late Antiquity to the early thirteenth century. In a nascent field, these studies have begun to chart the sea of tears with historical and theological narrative, developing an increasingly rich and complex story on the basis of Lot-Borodine’s

<sup>5</sup> Piroska Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Âge: Un instrument spirituel en quête d'institution (Ve-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000), 16.

<sup>6</sup> M. Lot-Borodine, “Le mystère du ‘don des larmes’ dans l’Orient chrétien,” *Vie Spirituelle* 48 (1935-1936), supp. 65-110; Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La doctrine de la compunction dans l’Orient chrétien*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, no. 132 (Rome: Pontificale Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1944); translated in *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, trans. Anselm Hufstader (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Hausherr, *Penthos*, trans. Hufstader, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Sandra J. McEntire, *Holy Tears: The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England*, *Studies in Medieval Literature*, vol. 8 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Nagy, *Don des larmes*, 30.

and Hausherr's groundwork.<sup>10</sup> There remains, nonetheless, work to be done, especially in breaking beyond the bounds of the Hausherrian discourse.

Lot-Borodine and Hausherr sought serious theological credence and mystical import for a practice of weeping assumed by their peers to express no more than piety. A combined tone of intellectual *apologia* and exoticisation pervades Lot-Borodine's plea for the topic:

The sacred learning of the Byzantines prolonged the ancient contemplative tradition of the desert, to attempt to establish speculatively one of the most sublime experiences of the spirit visited by the Spirit. This is why one can speak of a *theology of tears* in the Greek church (emphasis, Lot-Borodine).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The following is a synopsis of other studies that I have found useful on the history of tears in this period. Thomas Connolly's rich and detailed study of the roots of the theme of "mourning into joy" (Ps. 29.12) and its incorporation into the cult of St. Cecilia includes a fascinating account of the relationship between medieval and renaissance musicology and psychology, and a chapter on twelfth-century enthusiasm for the figure of King David as a penitent; *Mourning into Joy: Music, Raphael and St. Cecilia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Jean Leclercq's *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1957), 34-36, includes some important reflections on compunction in Benedictine culture pertaining especially to Gregory the Great. Carole Straw's *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), chapter nine, offers an original interpretation of the central importance of compunction in Gregory's spirituality. T. O'Loughlin and H. Conrad-O'Briain's "The 'Baptism of Tears' in Early Anglo-Saxon Sources," *Anglo Saxon England* 22 (1993): 65-83, explores the hagiographical *topos* of Gregory the Great's salvation of Emperor Hadrian through weeping. Jean-Charles Payen's *Le motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale des origines à 1230*, Publications romanes et françaises, no. 98 (Geneva: Droz, 1967) is an important study on the adoption of the popular penitential theme of repentance into vernacular literature. See also idem, "La pénitence dans le contexte culturel des XIIe et XIIIe siècles: Des doctrines contritionnistes aux pénitentiels vernaculaires," in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 61 (1977): 399-428. The literature on penitence is too vast to sample here, but Thomas N. Tentler's *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) devotes considerable attention to the treatment of tears in *Penitential and Confessor's Manuals*. The literature on the weeping Virgin and her laments relates to anthropological studies of grief and women's laments such as Margaret Alexiou's classic, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). More recent studies in this genre include: Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992). Gregory W. Dobrov's, "A Dialogue with Death: Ritual Lament and the θρήνος Θεοτόκου of Romanos Melodos," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 35 (1994): 385-405 explores the connection between pagen and Marian laments. Ignoring this connection, but otherwise an important general survey of the pious literature, is Sandro Sticco's *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1988). The only studies I have found that specifically treat the pictorial iconography of tears in this period are Moshie Barasch's "The Crying Face," *Artibus et Historiae* 15, no. 8 (1987): 21-36; and idem, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976). Barasch's concentration is on renaissance material. Pierre Courcelle's collection of pictorial representations of Augustine's conversion scene focusing on the words "Tolle, lege" is — inadvertently — a wonderful collection of compunction iconography; *Les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> Lot-Borodine, "Le mystère," 65-67, cited in McEntire, *Doctrine of Compunction*, 3.

Continuing in this mode, Hausherr wanted to present a Christian discourse that takes tears to their mystical zenith. To this end, his *Doctrine of 'Penthos' in the Christian East* brings a wide range of source material on the subject of tears into relative doctrinal conformity. In the first instance, Hausherr argues that, following the scriptural authority of 2 Corinthians 7.10, Eastern tradition drew a unanimous and iron-clad distinction between grief belonging "to the world" (*tristitia saeculi*) and Christian grief (*tristitia secundum Deum*) beneficial to the health (*salus*) and salvation of the soul.<sup>12</sup> The Christian fathers felt a "complete horror of grief of the world."<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom expresses a commonplace opinion when he describes grief at the loss of anything of this world as grief that should itself be regretted and grieved over. Grief at the death of a brother is not Christian, for the followers of Christ live in the spirit of a new age, in triumph over death. The death of the body is merely its temporary sleep before its joyful reawakening. To grieve over bodily death belies the truth of the resurrection, the fathers urged.<sup>14</sup>

The second genre of tear defined by Hausherr's Eastern canon after worldly, the first of two types of properly Christian tears, is the humble and obedient monastic tear. In their profession as "perpetual penitents," a monk's decorum, Origen teaches, is indicated by the line of Psalm 37.6-7: "My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning."<sup>15</sup> Humble tears of monastic obedience are fearful and penitential in character. Hausherr argues that whilst penitential tears are assuredly Christian, they are salutary only in a mediocre, purifying sense. Penitential tears are soiled by the sin they cleanse and contaminated with the affairs of the world.

Following Lot-Borodine's direction, Hausherr sought to find the ultimate expression of *penthos* within a spirituality that captured the dynamic directness characteristic of eremitic charisma. It is somewhat ironic that Hausherr found the

<sup>12</sup> Hausherr, *Penthos*, chapter four.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, trans. mine.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 31.2-3 (PG 57:373-74); Hausherr, *Penthos*, chapters four and five.

<sup>15</sup> Origen, *On prayer* 33.4; translated in Rowan A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom. Prayer and Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 170. On the doctrine that monastic life is defined by "continual penance," see Straw, *Gregory*, 149 and Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 58.

gratuitous unpredictability he associated with the desert monks exemplified in the writings of Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), the man famed for his systematisation of Origenist mysticism. Evagrius' schema of spiritual progression is structured by a Neoplatonist hierarchical ordering of creation from the lowest level of matter to the highest, supernal level of spirit. In the early stages, which Evagrius calls the "ascetic" as distinct from the higher "gnostic" life, the novice practices a moral and corporeal discipline directed towards purifying the soul. Purification enables a "detachment" which silences all of the demons of passion, liberating the soul from the world and its carnality.<sup>16</sup> In conformity with the Origenist doctrine that Spiritual presence is limited to a like substance, Evagrius considered a detached state reflective of divine immutability the prerequisite to Spiritual reception. For Hausherr, the most spiritual tears are those which anticipate the divinising experience of spiritual reception. "In the spirituality of the Evagrian tradition ... *penthos* is the secret of contemplation."<sup>17</sup> "Compunction ends in beatitude."<sup>18</sup> Expressing a certain humility before grace, Hausherr refrains from calling the highest spiritual form of tears "mystical." "Weeping comes first," he explains, "and weeping is a must. Mysticism comes afterwards, if it is God's will."<sup>19</sup>

This then, is where tears lead: to perfect peace, which is the prelude to the highest contemplation, to the revelation of the heavenly mysteries, to a marvellous transformation of the whole being.<sup>20</sup>

The Lot-Borodine/Hausherr classification of the spirituality of tears as an Eastern phenomenon, deeply affected subsequent investigation of the topic in the West, which has something of the character of a "recovery mission." McEntire views her study as directly complementary to Hausherr's.<sup>21</sup> Her history of the doctrine of compunction in continental Western Europe from the fourth to the twelfth century charts the development of a Latin theology of tears that conforms

<sup>16</sup> Jean Gribomont, "Eastern Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1985; London: SCM, 1989), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Hausherr, *Penthos*, trans. Hufstader, 150.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>21</sup> McEntire, *Doctrine of Compunction*, 9.

to Hausherr's hierarchy of tears as worldly, humble and spiritual.<sup>22</sup> McEntire takes Hausherr's ideal of *penthos* in an essentialist manner as the uncontextualised definition of compunction that creates the object of her study. Although doctrine on compunction is present in Latin sources "in patchwork form" for the length of the first millennium, it is not until the ninth century that compunction is defined in a way "which captures all of its essentials."<sup>23</sup> McEntire is inspired by the doctrine of compunction that flourished in the reformed monasticism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries because of its positiveness; her study is effervescent with optimism. The grace of tears is associated with the health and salvation of the soul and ultimately, at its highest levels, with a joyful and exultant foretaste of eternal beatitude.<sup>24</sup>

Piroska Nagy's study is distinguished from those of Hausherr and McEntire in offering a far more historically and culturally contextualised analysis of doctrinal development and transmission from East to West. The enormous range of doctrinal innovation presented by Nagy is too complex to summarise here. Yet for all its rich diversity, Nagy's study, like Hausherr's and McEntire's, is in the end governed by a preference for a particular theology of tears. My comments will focus on an historical moment of particular relevance to this study: namely, Nagy's exclusion of Augustinianism from the gift of tears.

Nagy's study revolves around the question she poses of how the unpredictable and involuntary nature of weeping — we are unable to weep at will — comes to be conceived in the Middle Ages as a charisma, gift or grace, which expresses an arbitrary divine act. The association between the aleatory character of tears and the ambiguities of grace is fundamental to the discursive construction of tears as a charismatic gift.

Unlike devotions and cumulative virtues, sanctity and its signs, charismas reveal grace *par excellence*, they are a divine election. Theology defines a charisma as a gift which is freely given by God, regardless of merit. The ambiguities of the gift of tears are partly inherent in lacrimal phenomena; and partly inherent to all phenomena issuing from grace.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> My comments pertain to the first half of McEntire's study. I am not concerned with her latter chapters on the doctrine of compunction in medieval England.

<sup>23</sup> McEntire, *Doctrine of Compunction*, 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-55.

<sup>25</sup> Nagy, *Don des larmes*, 22. See also p. 18.

On this basis, Nagy refines her topic in the distinction between charismatic tears and tears that express habitual disposition. The latter, “tears as *habitus*,” are still Christian, but they express the habitude of religious practice rather than the true fruit of God’s gift.<sup>26</sup>

Like Lot-Borodine, Hausherr and McEntire, Nagy locates the inspiration for the idea of a gift of tears in the eremitic and early monastic traditions of the desert fathers. It is here that all other forms of human affliction are distinguished from a particular type of tears that are construed as a Christian blessing following Matthew 5.5: “Blessed are those who mourn.”<sup>27</sup> In the *Apophthegmata*, or *Sayings of the Fathers*, we find the first distinctions between weeping as part of an ascetic practice connected with spiritual cleansing and tears as the charismatic revelation of divine power.<sup>28</sup> Nagy argues that it is John Climacus (ca. 575-649) who provides the first systematised doctrine on tears. Drawing from Evagrius’ ideas and the hierarchical schema of the Pseudo-Dionysius, Climacus constructs a scale of moral and spiritual progress which includes stages of weeping.<sup>29</sup> In Climacus, Nagy sees a melding of intellectual hierarchy with ascetic life that will have an enduring legacy within monastic traditions. “For Climacus, the reception of beatifying tears — that are a gift — join the fruit of asceticism to the enjoyment of God.”<sup>30</sup>

Having found, as it were, a highpoint in John Climacus, the entry-point of the gift of tears to the West is, for Nagy, somewhat delayed. Nagy argues that Augustine’s disillusion with spirituality that aspires to human perfection provoked his abandoning any attempt to formulate an individualised experience of a gift of tears. Instead, he concentrated on a model of collective redemption offered through the sacraments of the church.<sup>31</sup> The one-time spiritual optimism that allowed Augustine to convey a mystical sense of tears-as-conversion in his *Confessions* became subsumed by a negativity exemplified in his turning to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 86-94; 102.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 121, 123.

Monica's pious humility as the new paradigm for Christian tears.<sup>32</sup> We get a strong sense of what Nagy finds lacking in Augustine's spirituality in her comparison of John Cassian's Evagrianist conception of tears as mystical union with Gregory the Great's Augustinian redirection of grace into *habitus*. Nagy explains how:

For Gregory, the brevity of the ecstatic moment gives way to interminable listless and nostalgic tears. ... In place of divinisation through the detachment of the body that becomes pure spirit in its ecstatic unification with God [Cassian's version], Gregory associates the sacrificial union with God with renunciation, obedience, humility and charity ....<sup>33</sup>

For Nagy, the slide from the charisma of grace to the languor of habitude corresponds to the renunciation of divinisation for a socially-directed mode of *imitatio* encompassed by charity, obedience and humility. In this, Nagy detects the burden of Augustine<sup>34</sup> which will be long lasting.

The difference between the Evagrianist and the Gregorian conception of union with God designates a fundamental divergence between the anthropology of eastern and western Christianity, a divergence that dominates their respective conceptions of religious life.<sup>35</sup>

It is not until the eleventh century that Nagy finds a reassertion of a spirituality that "truly conveys the eremitic character of the gift of tears ... in which tears are the high-point of complete detachment from the world."<sup>36</sup> The founder of an Italian eremitic movement, Romuald, whose hagiography was penned by Peter Damian, "demonstrates the remarkable aptitude of an authentic case of the gift of tears."<sup>37</sup> Unlike other contemporaneous descriptions of tears as *habitus*, such as Anselm of Canterbury's famed compunction, here tears are "sought after as a veritable charisma, an effective sign of divine favour."<sup>38</sup>

Peter Damian seems to have truly conveyed the eremitic character of the gift of tears .... In conformity with a tradition which the desert inherited from the men of antiquity who approached God by a detachment from things, a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 123: the obvious flaw in this developmental theory is that Augustine's conversion scene and his depiction of Monica's weeping coincide in the same text, the *Confessions*, written, as Nagy would have it, during Augustine's optimistic period.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., "... le poids d'Augustin."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 230-31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 229.

method known in theological terms as the negative way, the heart ... detaches itself from the world. Only a dispassionate spirit is able to be irrigated by tears. A dry sadness proceeds from a servile fear of hell from a dry heart and not from the sincere repentance of a contrite heart that is born of heavenly desire and compunction of tears. But, for receiving the flow of tears, the spirit and the conscience must already be pure. The flow of tears continues to purify them. In this passage, Peter Damian identifies a heavenly grace with compunction of heart. The purity and the vision of the conscience designate the liberty of the soul, capable of crying.<sup>39</sup>

Nagy's treatment of Damian's ascensionism as the prerequisite for a true gift of tears exemplifies her essential confirmation of Hausherr's position that spiritual tears are perfected within contemplative excellence.

Instigated by Lot-Borodine's and Hausherr's initial characterisation of the doctrine of *penthos* and its history, the studies surveyed here locate the spirituality of tears within a tradition that exemplifies a very different theological orientation than the theology treated in this thesis. In the traditions surveyed by Nagy, McEntire and Hausherr, the spiritual dimension of tears — tears as an expression of grace, divine love, divinisation, freedom, beatitude and so on — is their otherworldliness. Worldly and spiritual tears are incommensurable species. Nagy defends tears that have been transubstantiated — tears whose unlikeness to ordinary tears is nothing short of divine dissimilitude — as the highest expression of mystical tears.<sup>40</sup> These studies redeem a spirituality for tears by emphasising a discourse in which spiritualness is a literal measure of inhumanity.

### *Mysticism and Morality*

When in his exacerbation of self-criticism he describes himself as petty, egotistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature, for all we know it may be that he has come very near to self-knowledge; we only wonder why a man must become ill before he can discover truth of this kind.

Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 195.

If only human beings would acknowledge themselves to be but human, and that he who glories would glory in the Lord (2 Cor. 10.17).

Augustine, *Confessions*

He does not despise man, but in an inconceivable manner esteems them highly just as they are, takes them into His heart and sets Himself in their place .... Thus He affirms man .... He does not reject the human! Quite the contrary!

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*

It is revealing that, in the studies we have looked at, the intimately human experience of weeping must be construed as inhuman before it can be valued as “spiritual” or “mystical.” Rather than reviewing a tradition that redeems tears by their sublimation, it seems to me that more profound theology about weeping takes real human tears, the actual cries which are a baby’s first utterance, as its serious subject matter. It does not separate out species of right and wrong grief in the manner of a penitential instruction to grieve for your sin but not for your brother’s death. It does not apply the letter of the law to such a human issue. Instead it asks: Why do we feel such intense pain at the loss of a loved one? What is the source and, if possible, the redemption of the emotional suffering that tears represent?

Beyond their distinction between worldly and spiritual tears, Hausherr’s and McEntire’s separation of mystical from humble tears, and Nagy’s distinction between charismatic and habitual tears, excludes even those tears that express Christian morality from the realm of the properly mystical. The associations of tears with ordinary weeping or with the social moral sphere, were connections these authors felt they had to break in order to justify the mystical dimension of tears. The tendency to emphasise mysticism’s exclusivity raises the important question of the nature of the relationship between mysticism and morality.

In so far as Christianity is a liberation narrative, its mysticism will be liberatory. The contemplative goal of “freedom” reflects this obvious point. The ideal of “grace-filled” tears thus necessarily expresses the Christian message of liberation. The question here is why these liberatory tears are associated with “mysticism” in distinction and even in opposition to “morality”? Nagy and Hausherr’s dismissal of tears pertaining to morality indicates that their definitions of what is moral do not include the mystical freedom represented by grace. Their

understanding of what is moral, in other words, is confined to those areas of life encompassed by moral law. It is not uncommon for studies of mysticism to distinguish “moral” from “grace” and “mystical” in this manner. While this distinction appropriately associates grace and freedom with the transcendence of spheres encompassed by moral law, it too often leads to an inappropriate separation of grace and freedom from the realm of human morality and moral discourse altogether. One important consequence of this tendency to divide mysticism from morality is that whilst scholars of mysticism naturally view concepts of freedom, love and grace as important, the discourse of moral theology in which these terms are substantially defined is not treated as central to the study of mysticism.

Bernard McGinn’s multi-volume study of Western mystical tradition (founded in the patristic tradition, developed in monasticism and so far climaxing in a flowering in the thirteenth century) provides some new paradigms with which we can begin to think about the history and nature of a Western mystical tradition. The most significant notion about mysticism McGinn’s work challenges is that mysticism can only be testified by personal experiential account. However eyewitness the genre, McGinn argues that “experience is not part of the historical record.”<sup>41</sup> Instead, McGinn defines mysticism in a way that encompasses all of the areas of Christian life touched by divine presence<sup>42</sup> and argues that all texts that discuss this presence — even if they do not literally “testify” to it — may be treated as sources for the study of mysticism. This expanded definition potentially gives new scope to treat works of moral philosophy as sources for ideas about mysticism.

McGinn himself, however, does not pursue the associations between mysticism and moral philosophy. This may, in some areas of his discussion, leave his presentation of concepts of grace, freedom and love with less definition than they require. At times McGinn separates mystical from moral domains in the same general fashion as Nagy and Hausherr. He finds Ambrose’s conception of

<sup>41</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 1, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), xiv.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii; McGinn’s later definitions emphasise love, e.g., *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism — 1200-1350* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 26.

the *mors mystica*, for example, “primarily moral not mystical in tone.”<sup>43</sup> Particularly in the first two volumes of *The Presence of God*, the purity of the “divine presence” that defines mysticism for McGinn is often proportionate to its exclusion from social life and distance from humanity. This reflects the teachings of some of the more rigidly ascensionist spiritual teachers he covers in these volumes. But, as I shall discuss in my individual chapters, I think it may lead McGinn to emphasise the place of contemplation in Augustine’s mysticism and ascensionism in Bernard of Clairvaux’s at the expense of other themes that may be more unique to and characteristic of them. Without reading grace within the discourse of moral philosophy, McGinn generally seems to treat the transcendence of law by grace as an act of divine intervention.<sup>44</sup> Defined in this way, the only alternative to moral law offered by grace involves the transcendence of morality altogether.

The tendency to interpret the goal of Christian liberation as a mystical path in distinction to a moral path puts the alternative ideal of grace on a completely different plane from that of ordinary human relations. But grace can also be interpreted as representing an alternative moral philosophy that transcends moral law but not human social life. In this sense, grace does not take wings and abandon morality; it represents an alternative human moral project.

The distinction between the freedom of grace and the habitude of merit that is fundamental to the liberatory project of mysticism derives from Pauline philosophy. In this thesis, I shall look at a direction of Pauline interpretation which holds that the full power of Paul’s philosophy of crucifixion as an alternative liberation narrative to the path of slavish moral obedience derives from the different choice Christ makes within the same human situation. In this light, the crucifixion is significant because it represents an act of moral freedom within a situation of moral constraint. Thus, from this perspective, grace is an ideal of freedom that transcends moral law without transcending the human condition. More than this, grace can even be viewed as necessarily brought to life whilst one

<sup>43</sup> McGinn, *Presence of God*, 1:207.

<sup>44</sup> McGinn defines Augustine’s understanding of grace, for example, as the “absolute divine initiative.” Thus he describes Bernard of Clairvaux’s emphasis on God’s initiation of love as in agreement with his Pauline and Augustinian understanding of the necessity of grace; *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 2, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 211-12, 194, 175.

is under the law. Mysticism informed by this reading of Pauline moral philosophy emphasises that the attainment of freedom, grace and love results from choosing a different path within the same situation of human constraint.

The association of grace and freedom with the human moral sphere stands in stark contrast with contemplative goals of freedom through detachment. Yet the former is the essence of Augustine's Pauline-inspired mysticism. In the first half of this thesis we shall look at the development of a humanist, mystical interpretation of weeping in the thought of Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux — three thinkers whose influence on Western Christianity has been enormous. In the second half, we shall consider the importance of a moral mysticism of tears within late-medieval spirituality in which enthusiasm for Christ's humanity and the incarnationalist message reached a new creative high.

In this tradition, rather than distinguishing mystical and non-mystical tears on the basis of their quota of Spirit or Divine Presence, their quota of divinity is itself judged by the degree to which they express an inalienably human freedom — the human impulse that reflects Christ's decision to be crucified. We shall see that goodness is born of the human experience of grief and weeping and that grace, unlike law, becomes the very stuff of human relations.



Fig. 2 *La composition d'Augustin et la révélation "Tolle, lege"* Painted on wood, Neushilt, ca.1460, reprinted from Coureelle, "Confessions" dans la tradition littéraire, pl. II.

## *Augustine of Hippo: Tears as a "Vita Mortalis"*

Why, my soul, are you sad, and why do you disturb me?

Psalm 41

### *My Mind's Delights*

Reflecting back on his life in his *Confessions*, Augustine associates the first time he read Cicero with his first experience of deeply painful loss in the death of a childhood friend. Both of these events are presented as turning points which predispose the young Augustine to a new attitude towards the world. After reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, Augustine describes how he felt empty of all vain hopes, worldly lusts and ambitions, and he experienced a longing for the immortality of wisdom "with an incredible ardour" in his heart.<sup>1</sup> A man comes to cherish philosophy through an experiential lesson Cicero describes, following a Platonic teaching, as a deep sting of grief.<sup>2</sup> "In the midst of mourning and grief"

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessionum* 3.4.7 (henceforth cited as *Conf.*) (CCSL 27:30): "... immortalitatem sapientiae concupiscebam aestu cordis incredibili ...."

<sup>2</sup> This is a general lesson of Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* (henceforth cited as *Tusc. disp.*). In *Tusc. disp.* 2.14.33, he refers to grief stinging: "Pungit dolor, vel fodiat sane ..."; and on the mind's desire for wisdom, see *Tusc. disp.* 1.19.44: "... natura inest in mentibus nostris insatiabilis quaedam cupiditas veri videndi ...." The origin of Cicero's teaching on the "sting of grief" is Plato's famous "pang of philosophy"; *Phaedrus* 218a-218b; on love of wisdom, see *Symposium* 204a-204b. For more on the influence of these passages on Plato on the Christian doctrine of compunction, see below p. 115 n. 23.

over the death of a beloved daughter,<sup>3</sup> Cicero discovers that when a man is struck by deep grief, its assault is twofold. Struck once, he feels a still deeper pang that it is “the law of entry to the world that evil is inescapable.”<sup>4</sup> Evil circumstances cannot be controlled by wilful forgetfulness or concealment, “they tear us in pieces; their touch is fiery, they do not allow us to breathe.”<sup>5</sup> Augustine is impressed by the romantic, not the stoic Cicero. In the days when he experienced grief and wrote on the subject, Cicero confesses that he was “no wise man.”<sup>6</sup> Augustine’s interpretation of Cicero’s grief-stricken epiphany is that an experience of soul-piercing pain returns the soul to knowledge of its true condition, shattering an illusion of false happiness. Ultimately, however, Cicero rationalises an experience Augustine is unable to; through becoming wise, Cicero “gets over” his grief. Cicero argues that the sudden consciousness of mortality turns an ordinary man into a philosopher because it teaches him a painful lesson of detachment.

Shortly after Augustine discovered Cicero, he found himself living out his teacher’s greatest theme, by confronting death. When his closest boyhood friend died, Augustine was stung by great and inconsolable grief. Bereft, he felt as if his life was but a shadow and his own existence a problem.

My heart was darkened by grief, and whatever I looked at was death. My home town was a punishment to me, and my father’s house was a strange unhappiness. Whatever I had shared with him, without him had turned into a tortuous cruelty. My eyes expected him everywhere but they never found him (cf., Cant. 3.1; 5.6); and I hated everything which was without him. Now they were not able to say to me, “Look, he’s coming!” as they had during his life when he had been away. I had made myself into a great question for myself, and I asked my soul why it had been sad and why I was so deeply disturbed,

<sup>3</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.29.63: “... in medio ... maerore et dolore ...” King notes that Cicero wrote the *Consolations* to console himself at the death of his daughter Tullia in 45 BC; in Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King, Loeb Classical Library, no. 141, rev. ed. (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 77 n. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.24.59: “... lege esse nos natos, ut nemo in perpetuum esse posset expers mali, gravius etiam tulisse.” On the wretchedness of the human condition see also *Tusc. disp.* 1.5.9-10.

<sup>5</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.16.35: “... non est enim in nostra potestate fodicantibus iis rebus, quas malas esse opinemur, dissimulatio vel oblivio: lacerant, vexant, stimulos admovent, ignes adhibent, respirare non sinunt.”

<sup>6</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.29.65: “... in *Consolationis* libro, quem in medio — non enim sapientes eramus — maerore et dolore conscripsimus.”

and my soul knew of nothing to respond .... Tears alone were sweet to me and they took my friend's place as my mind's delights (Ps. 138.11).<sup>7</sup>

He was overwhelmed by sadness and grief for what has been lost. "Although I didn't hope that he would come back to life and my tears didn't ask for this, nonetheless I still grieved and wept greatly."<sup>8</sup> When he could not bear to remember his joy, he was happier with his tears. He found that "weeping is pleasurable at the moments when we shrink from the memory of the things which we formerly enjoyed."<sup>9</sup> In his grief, Augustine asks God to "move the ear of my heart close to your mouth" so that I can "hear from you who are the truth ... so that you can explain to me why weeping is sweet to us when we are miserable? ... I found myself heavily weighed down by a sense of being tired of living and scared of dying."<sup>10</sup> He felt a great hatred and fear of death. "I believed ... that this great death, which had taken him away from me ... was suddenly about to consume all humanity ... life was horrible to me .... I dreaded everything, even light itself."<sup>11</sup>

In this depressed frame of mind, Augustine realised that everything that he had previously been attached to was limited, partial and mortal. All that he had once thought good, everything that had filled his heart, now left him in the deepest pain. What true good was there in these mortal shadows to which he had clung? He was converted to the idea that his only hope was in the darkness itself; seeing life as darkness, illusion, shadow and misery became, for Augustine, the

<sup>7</sup> *Conf.* 4.4.9 (CCSL 27:44): "Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat. Et erat mihi patria supplicium et paterna domus mira infelicitas, et quidquid cum illo communicaueram, sine illo in cruciatum immanem uerterat. Expetabant eum undique oculi mei, et non dabatur; et oderam omnia, quod non haberent eum, nec mihi iam dicere poterant: 'Ecce ueniet,' sicut cum uiueret, quando absens erat. Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio et interrogabam animam meam, quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me ualde, et nihil nouerat respondere mihi. ... Solus fletus erat dulcis mihi et successerat amico meo in deliciis animi mei" (Ps. 138.11).

<sup>8</sup> *Conf.* 4.5.10 (CCSL 27:45): "Neque enim sperabam reuiuere illum aut hoc petebam lacrimis, sed tantum dolebam et flebam."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "An et fletus res amara est et prae fastidio rerum, quibus prius fruebamur, et tunc ab eis abhorremus, delectat?"

<sup>10</sup> *Conf.* 4.5.10 (CCSL 27:45): "'Possumne audire abs te, qui ueritas es, et admouere aurem cordis mei ori tuo, ut dicas mihi, cur fletus dulcis sit miseris?'" *Conf.* 4.6.11 (CCSL 27:45): "... et taedium uiuendi erat in me grauissimum et moriendi metus."

<sup>11</sup> *Conf.* 4.6.11 (CCSL 27:45): "Credo ... hoc magis mortem, quae mihi cum abstulerat ... eam repente consumpturam omnes homines putabam ... et ideo mihi horrore erat uita ...." *Conf.* 4.7.12 (CCSL 27:46): "Horrebant omnia et ipsa lux."

first step to real truth and true hope. In so far as all things are limited by mortality, they are to that degree unreal.

The double-edged poignancy of loss described by Cicero had stung Augustine. Losing a true friend, he realised that death had put its condition on life. Hannah Arendt comments that: "There can be no doubt that death ... was the most crucial experience in Augustine's life."<sup>12</sup> The comfortable, happy life of Augustine's past now seemed unrecognisable to him. Augustine's theme of the experience of profound alienation from external reality is influenced not only by Cicero's brand of Platonism but also by the Neoplatonism of Plotinus. Elsewhere in the *Confessions*, Augustine describes how he suddenly found himself far from God in a "region of dissimilitude."<sup>13</sup> When his friend died, Augustine felt as if his father's house had become a strange and unhappy place. Elsewhere, in more directly Neoplatonic terms, he describes the experience of the lost soul as "the sorrow of the exile stirred by longing for his fatherland."<sup>14</sup> Following a Ciceronian and Aristotelian ideal of friendship, when he loses his friend to death, Augustine feels as if he has lost a part of himself: "I had departed from myself. I could not even find myself, much less you!"<sup>15</sup> As for Hamlet, the world "appeared no other thing than a pestilent congregation of vapour."

"But tell me," Augustine begs his God, "why tears are sweet to me in my misery?"<sup>16</sup> The only thing that differentiates Augustine's revelation of the "region of unlikeness" and "life defined by mortality" from the conversion to wisdom described by Plotinus or Cicero is the *comfort* he finds in his tears. Faced with loss, Augustine does not deliberate, he weeps. "Should a man waste his time

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 13; Peter Brown says something similar in *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 405.

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* 7.10.16 (CCSL 27:103): "... et inueni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis." On the singular importance for Augustine of this above all of Plotinus' other teachings see Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 22. Robert O'Connell interprets the significance of Augustine's grief over his friend in this scene (*Conf.* 4.4-4.6) as an expression of Plotinus' teachings; *St. Augustine's "Confessions": The Odyssey of a Soul* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap, 1969), 112.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *De trinitate* 4.1 (henceforth cited as *De trin.*) (CCSL 50:159): "... dolorem peregrinationis suae ex desiderio patriae suae."

<sup>15</sup> *Conf.* 5.2.2 (CCSL 27:58): "... ego autem et a me discesseram nec me inueniebam: quanto minus te!" On this classical idea of a friend as a second self in Augustine, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> *Conf.* 4.5.10 (CCSL 27:45), cited above n. 10.

crying like a child that has bumped itself?" Plato had demanded in a sentiment seconded by Plotinus, who thought man's susceptibility to grief a deficiency of Intelligence.<sup>17</sup> Yet, for Augustine, the image of a crying babe epitomises humanity and the human condition. The tears with which babies greet the world are an "unconscious prophecy of the troubles into which it is entering."<sup>18</sup>

The awareness of death that Cicero describes makes a man realise the truth of his ultimate self-sufficiency. It is a painful but necessary lesson of detachment. Grief is conquered forever when the philosopher realises that he lacks and needs nothing. "Grief is a matter of opinion."<sup>19</sup> If you decide you do not lack anything, then you do not. The trick is not to expect too much. When the ancient philosopher Anaxagoras (ca.500-ca.428 BC) receives the news of his son's death, he does not grieve but instead reflects, "I always knew that I had conceived a mortal."<sup>20</sup> Cicero applauds this crude displacement of feeling by knowledge. In modern terms, it is as if Cicero were arguing that grief is cultural, not natural. Convention and opinion tell us that we cannot let go of a loved one, but the effects of time numb our feelings, showing that in reality we can and do let go, he argues. Change your own mind about these things, shed these old habits of thought and you can be free of them.<sup>21</sup>

In a dialogue between himself and Reason in his *Soliloquies*, Augustine addresses the Stoic mantra that wisdom conquers grief. Voicing Cicero's position, Reason asks Augustine, "When you find that this life is of such a kind that you can know no more in it than you already know, will you restrain yourself from tears?" and Augustine responds, "Oh no, I will weep so much that life itself will

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Republic* 604c-d; Augustine refers to a discussion in which Socrates argues that grief is akin to stupidity; *De civitate Dei* 14.8 (henceforth cited as *De civ. Dei*) (CCSL 48:425); on Plotinus' views see Henry Chadwick in Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 176 n. 33.

<sup>18</sup> *De civ. Dei* 21.14 (CCSL 48:780): "... non a risu sed a fletu orditur hanc lucem, quid malorum ingressa sit nesciens prophetat quodam modo."

<sup>19</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.28.71: "... ex quo intelligitur non in natura, sed in opinione esse aegritudinem." See also *Tusc. disp.* 3.27.65. For Cicero's discussion of emotions as "opinationes" or acts of belief in Stoic thought, see *Tusc. disp.* 4.7.14-15.

<sup>20</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.24.58: "... et Anaxagoras: 'Sciebam me genuisse mortalem.'" In a similar vein, Arendt quotes another Stoic, Epictetus, who says, "I must die ... but must I die groaning?" *Discourses* 1.1; *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.27.66: "Ergo in potestate est abicere dolorem, cum velis." In a wise man the effects of time should be replaced by the foreknowledge of wisdom; *Tusc. disp.* 3.24.58; and 3.22.52-54. On the idea that grief is conventional not natural, see *Tusc. disp.* 3.26.62 and 3.31.74.

be finished.”<sup>22</sup> These tears stem from the impatience of love and they will never end if love is not given what it loves.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Question of Grief*

The question of the virtuous nature of grief is a linch-pin in Augustine’s lengthy discussion in book fourteen of his *City of God* on the difference between Christian and Platonist interpretations of the emotions.<sup>24</sup> Augustine’s discussion diligently explains Cicero’s treatment of this same question in which he demonstrates the categorical exclusion of grief from the higher mental realm of the spirit.<sup>25</sup> Cicero argues that the mutual exclusivity of virtue and grief inheres even in the natural etymological correspondence between the word *virtus*, meaning virtue and bravery, and *vir*, meaning man.<sup>26</sup> “What is more disgraceful for a man than womanish weeping!” Cicero declares, “A man’s duty is to conquer adverse circumstances, not to surrender to lament! Weeping was bestowed on women’s nature.”<sup>27</sup>

To divide the soul into two parts, to one of which is “assigned a share in reason, to the other none,” is a “time-honoured distinction,” Cicero recounts (in an argument that Augustine reiterates verbatim) first made by Pythagoras and after him by Plato.<sup>28</sup> The first is the seat of tranquillity, peace, quiet and constancy, the second of wild emotions like anger and lust that are the enemies of

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *Soliloquiorum* (henceforth cited as *Sol.*) 2.1 (PL 32:885): “R: Quid, si ipsa vita talis esse inveniatur, ut in ea tibi nihil amplius quam nosti, nosse liceat? Temperabis a lacrimis? A: Imo tantum flebo ut vita nulla sit.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., “... impatiens est amor, nec lacryma modus fit, nisi amori detur quod amatur.”

<sup>24</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.7 (CCSL 48:423): “De tristitia uero ... scrupulosior quaestio est, utrum inueniri possit in bono.” See discussion in *De civ. Dei* 14.7-8 (CCSL 48:421-25).

<sup>25</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.6.14, see below p. 32 n. 37; in *De civ. Dei* 14.8 (CCSL 48:425) Augustine describes how the Stoics “sapientem aiunt tristem non posse.”

<sup>26</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 2.18.43: “Appellata est enim ex viro virtus; viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo, cuius munera duo sunt maxima mortis dolorisque contemptio.”

<sup>27</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 2.24.58: “Quid est enim fletu muliebri viro turpius?” *Tusc. disp.* 2.21.50: “Conqueri fortunam advorsam, non lamentari decet; Id viri est officium: fletus muliebri ingenio additus.” Cicero attributes this quote to a play called the *Niptra*.

<sup>28</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.5.10: “... in his explicandis veterem illam equidem Pythagorae primum, dein Platonis discriptionem sequar, qui animum in duas partes dividunt, alteram rationis participem faciunt, alteram expertem.”

reason.<sup>29</sup> Zeno defined the Greek term for the disorder of emotion, *πάθος* (*perturbatio*), as “an agitation of the soul opposed to right reason and contrary to nature.”<sup>30</sup> Plato famously characterised the relationship between body and soul as one of leadership rather than harmony. Unlike the lyre and its music, which function harmoniously together, Socrates demonstrates that body and soul are in opposition.<sup>31</sup> That the soul is “fitted to lead and rule” the impulses of the body “is itself a far more divine thing than a harmony .... Of all the parts that make up a man, do you think any is ruler except the soul, especially if it be a wise one?” The soul opposes the body, drawing it away from drinking when it is thirsty and from eating when it is hungry.<sup>32</sup> Like the admirable demonstration of the mind’s rule in regard to food, in his discussion of grief (*Republic* 603e-606e), Socrates argues that the admittedly natural response of grief should be denied in a man of principle by enforcing mental control over the appetites of the body. “Giving in” to grief is a submission to “the weaker element in man’s nature” and an offence to his “obedience to reason and principle,” which demands that he not grieve publicly.<sup>33</sup>

Recounting the anthropology of the philosophers, Cicero explains how three of the four “primary emotions,” namely desire (*desiderium*), joy (*laetitia*) and fear (*metus*), when they “become more constant and prudent,” can be experienced by the philosopher. To desire with reason is to “will.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly subject to rational conditioning, joy becomes “gladness” (*gaudium*) and fear becomes “caution” (*cautio*).<sup>35</sup> Although these three can be elevated to compatibility with the wise man, the fourth primary emotion, grief, can

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, “In particeps rationis ponunt tranquillitatem, id est, placidam quietamque constantiam, in illa altera motus turbidos cum irae tum cupiditatis contrarios inimicosque rationi.”

<sup>30</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.6.11: “Est igitur Zenonis haec definitio, ut perturbatio sit, quod *πάθος* ille dicit, aversa a recta ratione contra naturam animi commotio.”

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 86-95.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 94b,e; translated in Plato, vol. 1, “*Euthyphro*”; “*Apology*”; “*Crito*”; “*Phaedo*”; “*Phaedrus*,” trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 325; see also *Republic* 439b, c.

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Republic* 604b, translated in Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, 2nd rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 434. For a summary of debate on the significance of these passages in Plato’s thought see Elizabeth Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing our Attention to Suffering* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), p. 32 n. 5; my thanks to Jo Atkin for this reference.

<sup>34</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.6.12: “Id cum constanter prudenterque fit, eius modi appetitionem Stoici *βούλησις* appellant, nos appellemus ‘voluntatem.’ Eam illi putant in solo esse sapiente, quam sic definiunt: voluntas est, quae quid cum ratione desiderat.”

<sup>35</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.6.13-14.

categorically make no such transformation.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, for Cicero wisdom itself is defined as the frame of mind in which one has come to terms with the human condition and no longer grieves over it. Being wise and feeling grief are mutually exclusive. Cicero describes the “great soul” of the wise man as necessarily beyond the experience of human grief because — by definition — greatness of soul could never admit to the limitation of grief.

Moreover, it inevitably follows, if he is strong, for this same man to have a great soul; and the man who is great in his soul, is invincible, and the man who is invincible, to him, human things are despised and judged beneath him; but no man is able to despise those things which make him feel affected with grief; and from this it follows that a strong man is never affected with grief; but all philosophers are strong, therefore a philosopher is not susceptible to grief.<sup>37</sup>

The other three primary emotions — desire, joy and even fear — can become acts of the will when they become “reasonable desires.” In doing so, they become states of mind rather than “perturbations,” “appetites,” or “diseases” of the body. Because it fails to make this transition, grief remains tainted with bodily associations.

Reiterating this entire discussion in book fourteen of his *City of God*, Augustine argues that whilst Cicero chooses to call grief (*dolor*) “sickness” (*aegritudo*), in order to emphasise its retarded connection to the body, it is more Christian to do the opposite. Grief should be called sadness (*tristitia*) in order that this mental pain can be in no way confused with bodily suffering.<sup>38</sup> Augustine

<sup>36</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 4.6.14: “Sic quattuor ‘perturbationes’ sunt, tres ‘constantiae,’ quoniam aegritudini nulla constantia opponitur.”

<sup>37</sup> *Tusc. disp.* 3.7.15: “Praeterea necesse est, qui fortis sit, eundem esse magni animi; qui magni animi sit, invictum; qui invictus sit eum res humanas despiciere atque infra se positas arbitrari; despiciere autem nemo potest eas res, propter quas aegritudine adfici potest; ex quo efficitur fortem virum aegritudine numquam adfici; omnes autem sapientes fortes; non cadit igitur in sapientem aegritudo.”

<sup>38</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.7 (CCSL 48:423): “De tristitia uero, quam Cicero magis aegritudinem appellat, dolorem autem Vergilius ... sed ideo malui tristitiam dicere, quia aegritudo uel dolor usitatus in corporibus dicitur.” Augustine defines grief as “pain of the mind” in *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:438): “... sicut animi dolor, quae tristitia nuncupatur.” Or in *Sol.* 1.9.16 (PL 32:878): “... morbis animi et perturbationibus agitaris.” Of course Augustine does not rigorously stick to *tristitia*, and often uses *dolor*.

argues that for Christians grief is mental and can be virtuous, and he cites numerous biblical examples of "sadness according to God" (2 Cor. 7.11).<sup>39</sup>

The tendency to see the body's vulnerability as limiting to inner freedom was a common Stoic doctrine. Preserving a condition of tranquillity or *apatheia* (lit. "dispassion," freedom from passion), a wise man is taught to resist the disturbances to his mental tranquillity arising from the body. When Augustine locates the source of disturbance in the *mind* rather than the body, he breaks down the dualism of the classic Stoic doctrine. Matching Cicero's verbal pedantry, Augustine's preference for *tristitia* over *dolor* or *aegritudo* indicates a self-conscious effort to subvert the hierarchy of Stoic and Platonist mind/body dualism. The perturbations which humanity suffers are not physical, but mental. Grief cannot therefore simply be overcome by limiting it to the bodily realm. Sadness is all-pervasive, Augustine's tears are never-ending.

Stoic notions of *apatheia* and *virtus* had played an important role in the old arena of Christian struggle, in which Christ's "triumph over the flesh" was literally imitated in the pursuit of bodily death by martyrdom.<sup>40</sup> Just as Cicero associated virtue (*virtus*) with the strength of men (*viri*), the Christian martyrs' stoic resistance to bodily pain was also associated with the prowess of masculinity, as Elizabeth Clark has shown.<sup>41</sup> Augustine's teaching on the mental nature of grief is part of a widespread movement amongst fourth-century theologians to replace the dualism implicit in bodily martyrdom with new interiorised models of spiritual life. Reflecting the triumph of a non-dualist interpretation of the Trinity at the Council of Nicea in 325, Christian asceticism of the fourth century, consisted of spiritual rather than physical mortification.<sup>42</sup> It is no coincidence that Augustine's argument in favour of the virtue of mental grief in book fourteen of the *City of God* occurs in the context of his important

<sup>39</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.9 (CCSL 48:425-28). As biblical support of grief, Augustine cites 2 Cor. 7-11, Matth. 26.38; 26.75 and compiles a further list of biblical references to the emotions of Jesus: Marc. 3.5; Joan. 11.15; Joan. 11.35; Luc. 22.15; Matth. 26.38.

<sup>40</sup> On the relationship between Stoicism and martyrdom see: Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 55-59, 181; Robert Gaston, "Attention to Decorum in Early Christian Prayer," in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, ed. Pauline Allen, Raymond Canning and Lawrence Cross (Queensland: Australian Catholic University Press, 1998), 81-96.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, *Studies in Women and Religion*, no. 20 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Chadwick, *Cassian*, 22-24.

anti-dualist exegesis of Paul's use of the term "flesh" (*caro*), which, Augustine argues, does not signify the body but the misdirection of the mental will.<sup>43</sup>

Augustine attacks heretical dualism vociferously, and he is a key proponent of the new interiorised spirituality. His opposition to dualist heresies like Manichaeism, however, extends into a strident critique of the forms of interiorised spirituality being proposed by Christian followers of Origen and Evagrius. As Augustine saw it, and to his immense ire, Christian spiritualists reinvented the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*, purged of its most explicit dualism. Replacing the struggle between mind and body that is integral to Stoic *apatheia*, Chadwick explains that fourth-century Christians like Athanasius taught that "a more Christian doctrine was not to kill the body but the passions."<sup>44</sup> "We all have a demon" and our demons, Origen teaches, are the passions. We are "demon possessed" when we "cast behind us the words of God about freedom from passion."<sup>45</sup>

A number of scholars have recently argued that rather than the simple exclusion of all emotion from the higher realm of the mind characteristic of the Stoic ideal, Christian *apatheia* involves the transformation of emotion from an earthly to a spiritual form.<sup>46</sup> Thus Augustine's criticism of Christian *apatheia* as "the state of mind in which the mind can be moved by no emotion whatever" is arguably misconceived.<sup>47</sup> But Augustine's fundamental objection to the idea of *apatheia* in any form is an issue of self-control. And this critique may validly apply to at least some versions of Christian *apatheia*.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine argues, for example, that the devil has no body but he certainly has "flesh" defined in this way; *De civ. Dei* 14.3 (CCSL 48:416-18). Patout Burns puts it neatly, "Spirit and flesh, therefore, are opposed not as mind and body, but as grace and sin"; "Grace: The Augustinian Foundation," in *Christian Spirituality*, 336. Brown describes Augustine's "exceptional care" in making this point; *Body and Society*, 418.

<sup>44</sup> Chadwick, *Cassian*, 22-24.

<sup>45</sup> Origen, *Commentaria in Evangelium Joannis* 20.332; translated in Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 2, *Books, 13-32*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 89 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 279.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Study of his Writings*, trans. Robert Daly (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 9. Michael Casey, "The Journey from Fear to Love: John Cassian's Road Map," in *Prayer and Spirituality*, 181-195; McGinn, *Presence of God*, 1:106; Kallistos Ware, "Ways of Prayer and Contemplation: Eastern," in *Christian Spirituality*, 398; Brown, *Body and Society*, 130-31; Hausherr, *Penthos*, trans. Hufstader, 169.

<sup>47</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48: 428). Quoted below p. 35 n. 50.

Augustine argues that Stoics and Platonists cannot simply banish all grief from the mind because it is not within a man's power to control his feelings in this happy way. Augustine's argument against Pelagius over *apatheia* notoriously arrives at the issue of sexuality. Although Christian *apatheia* may involve emotion, it still excludes lust. In stooping so low as to admit that his mind cannot even control something as base as his erection, Augustine plays his trump card against Pelagius.<sup>48</sup>

Christian teachings on "ordered affections" — even the very term "ordered affections"<sup>49</sup> — reflect a form of self-regulation that Augustine opposes on moral grounds. He describes *apatheia* as the worst kind of *moral* defect.<sup>50</sup> The Christian doctrine of *apatheia*, or ordered emotions, may allow a degree of emotional uncontrollability amongst the higher, cleansed or "spiritual" emotions, but in so far as it insists on self-control over the base carnal emotions like libido it assumes some element of self-governance. And this is what Augustine, as a Christian, objects to so strongly, and what he describes as "Platonism."

As we have seen, Augustine's defence of the potentially virtuous nature of mental grief is a pivotal point in his refutation of the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*, which condemns all grief because of its bodily affinities. We shall see that his equally vociferous condemnation of the Christian spiritual doctrine of *apatheia* is also evident in his defence of grief — albeit not for its virtuosity, but for its humanity.

When his mother dies, Augustine tries to "restrain himself" using the "Greek method" of bathing to achieve tranquillity, to no avail.

As I closed her eyes, a wave of grief gathered in my breast and flowed out into tears and, at the same time, the mind, with its violent rule, sucked them back into my eyes until their fountain was dry.<sup>51</sup>

Eventually, however, he breaks down into tears.

<sup>48</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.16 (CCSL 48:439).

<sup>49</sup> "Affectiones ordinatae" or "cupiditas ordinata"; Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 240 n. 211.

<sup>50</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:428): "Porro, si *apatheia* illa dicenda est, cum animum contingere omnino non potest ullus affectus, quis hunc stuporem non omnibus uitiis iudicet esse peiorem?"

<sup>51</sup> *Conf.* 9.12. 29 (CCSL 27:150): "Premebam oculos eius, et confluebat in praecordia mea maestitudo ingens et transluebat in lacrimas, ibidemque oculi mei uiolento animi imperio resorbabant fontem suum usque ad siccitatem."

I was allowed to weep in your sight, for her and on her behalf, for me and on my behalf. And I let out the tears, which were continuous, so that they flowed as much as they wanted.<sup>52</sup>

Conventionally, Augustine describes grief over death as wasted emotion. Parodying the Stoics, he rants: "What madness, not to know how to love human beings with an awareness of human limits! How stupid man is to be unable to restrain his feelings in suffering the human lot!"<sup>53</sup> Yet these Stoic notions are swiftly dealt with by the reminder of Matthew's gospel where: "It was said by Truth, by your Son, 'If anyone says to his brothers, "Fool," he will be liable to the fire of hell'" (Matth. 5.22).<sup>54</sup> To which Augustine adds a characteristic expression: "If only human beings would acknowledge themselves to be but human," and that "he who glories would glory in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10.17).<sup>55</sup>

Augustine describes the mind's rule as an act of violence, in contrast with which his God allows him to weep for himself and for the love he feels towards his mother. Similarly, in his *Soliloquies*, Augustine responds to Reason with the weeping that would rather quench life itself than rest in rational resolutions that do not satisfy. He describes the mind, "with its violent rule," sucking back his tears and drying up their fountain. But, after some conflict, he is allowed to weep in God's sight and he lets his continuous tears "flow out as much as they wanted." This is a struggle not between mind and body, but between a mind divided into a psychological will and rational understanding. For Augustine, all emotions — even all libido — are movements of the *mental* will. But the key point here is no longer simply an anti-dualism that would divide Augustine together with orthodoxy from the Stoics. It is now a moral issue that divides him from even Christian notions of ordered affections.

Augustine's surrender to his *worldly* grief over Monica is an uncontrollable, libidinous and fleshly experience that is contrary to the law he

<sup>52</sup> *Conf.* 9.12.33 (CCSL 27:206): "... et libuit flere in conspectu tuo de illa et pro illa, de me et pro me. Et dimisi lacrimas, quas continebam, ut effluerent quantum uelient! ...."

<sup>53</sup> *Conf.* 4.7.12 (CCSL 27:46): "O demerentiam nescientem diligere homines humaniter! O stultum hominem immoderate humana patientem!" Although this passage comes from book four, it describes essentially the same conflict that Augustine is struggling with in book nine.

<sup>54</sup> *Conf.* 9.13.34 (CCSL 27:152): "Et dictum est a ueritate, filio tuo: 'si quis dixerit fratri suo 'fatue' reus erit gehennae ignis'" (Matth. 5.22).

<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* 9.13.34 (CCSL 27:152): "O si cognoscant se homines homines et qui gloriatur, in domino gloriatur!" (2 Cor. 10.17) Similar expressions occur in, for example, *De doct. Christ.* prooemium 6 (CCSL 32:4): "... homines per homines ... discerent." See also *Conf.* 4.7.12 (CCSL 27:46).

would like to rationally acquiesce to. He tries but fails to restrain his tears. Just as Paul says: "I do not understand my own actions: for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate .... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7.15; 7.19), so Augustine describes this struggle of will represented in a crisis over what he should weep for: "Enjoyments that I should weep over contend with sorrows that I should rejoice over, and which side is victorious, I do not know."<sup>56</sup> Unlike Greek philosophical ideals of independence and self-unity, Augustine's anguish over his grief shows him as being characteristically "of two minds" about it and he criticises the Adam-like Platonists as people "who think that they can come to God" — or indeed, to goodness or freedom — "by their own power and strength of character."<sup>57</sup>

Augustine's worldly grief over his mother's death, and his demonstration in book fourteen of *City of God* that grief is a potentially good mental instability, exemplify his argument against the Platonist belief in the wise man's achievement of self-control. Augustine's more famous demonstrations of the uncontrollability of orgasm and erection — like his inability to control his dreams, and like his numerous other examples of irrepressible sensual temptations<sup>58</sup> — simply reiterate the same point he makes in regards to grief. None of these things are purely bodily since "the so-called pains of the flesh are pains of the soul .... For what pain or desire does the flesh experience by itself apart from a soul?"<sup>59</sup> Even libido is mental. This is demonstrated by the fact the libido can sometimes arouse the mind but fail to arouse the body — as in the case of impotence.<sup>60</sup> This

<sup>56</sup> *Conf.* 10.28.39 (CCSL 27:238): "Contendunt laetitiae meae flendae cum laetandis maeroribus, et ex qua parte stet uictoria nescio .... [Ei mihi! Domine, miserere mei!]"

<sup>57</sup> *De trin.* 4.15.20 (CCSL 50:187): "Sunt autem quidam qui se putant ad contemplandum deum et inhaerendum deo uirtute propria posse purgari ...." Passages against Platonists and "the philosophers" are common in Augustine's later writings; see, for example, *De trin.* 4.15-18.20-24 (CCSL 50:187-93). Augustine's description of Adam's fall in book fourteen of *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:434-35) is a none-too-veiled critique of Platonist self-sufficiency.

<sup>58</sup> On orgasm: *De civ. Dei* 14.16 (CCSL 48:439); on dreams: *Sol.* 1.14.25 (PL 32:881-82); *Conf.* 10.30.41 (CCSL 27:176-77). On other sensual temptations: *Conf.* 10.31.43-10.35.54 (CCSL 27:177-84).

<sup>59</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:438): "Dolores porro, qui dicuntur carnis, animae sunt .... Quid enim caro per se ipsam sine anima uel dolet uel concupiscit?" Translated in Saint Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, vol. 4, trans. Phillip Levine, Loeb Classical Library, no. 414 (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 351.

<sup>60</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.16 (CCSL 48:439). The term "libido," lust, is the term used for any form of desire, *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:438): "... in genitalibus usitatus libido nominatur, cum hoc sit generale uocabulum omnis cupiditatis." And *cupiditas* is a form of love, *De civ. Dei* 14.7 (CCSL 48:422): "Amor ergo inhians habere quod amatur cupiditas est ..."; and all love is a movement of the

seemingly physical disobedience is, in fact, the mental disobedience of a mind at war with itself. Man is not his own mental master, as those who deny the power of emotion would like to believe. "When the mind commands itself," he says, "it is resisted."<sup>61</sup> Plato's vision of a government of wise men is a "happy situation" which — Augustine is adamant — cannot exist for humanity.<sup>62</sup>

These arguments do not stem from the fact that Augustine had problems with his sex life!<sup>63</sup> Augustine's reputedly pessimistic perception of what humanity can achieve is entirely shaped by his consciousness of the human condition under law. His failure to achieve self-mastery demonstrates that the human will perversely resists the compulsive pressure of a "thou shalt not" command. Augustine's pessimism *about the law* is based on the moral philosophy of Romans. Paul says that the law "increases the trespass" (Rom. 5.20) and "revives sin" (Rom. 7.9-10). "The law brings wrath" (Rom. 4.15). Indeed, the very fact of being told not to do something that is forbidden can actually perversely encourage people to do that very thing. Sin, Paul says repeatedly, "finds *opportunity* in the commandment" (Rom. 7.8; 7.11). "I should not have known what it is to covet, if law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7.7). The moral malaise of a society governed by laws is that the presence of laws perpetually creates the need for ever more laws.

As well as arousing a perverse inclination to disobey just for the sake of it, people also live in a state of fear before law. Under the law, man feels fear (Rom. 8.15), because the power behind law is the oppressive threat of punishment. The

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mental will. On the continuity between *caritas* and *cupiditas* that consists of their common origin in *appetitus*, craving desire, see Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 17-18; Arendt also notices the interchangeable terminology of *cupiditas* and *libido*; p. 20. Brown comments that, for Augustine, "sexual desire was no more tainted with this tragic, faceless concupiscence than was any other form of human activity": *Body and Society*, 418, citing Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 10.20.36.

<sup>61</sup> *Conf.* 8.9.21 (CCSL 27:171): "... imperat animus sibi, et resistitur."

<sup>62</sup> *De trin.* 3.4.9 (CCSL 50:135); see also *De civ. Dei* 19.27 (CCSL 48:697-98).

<sup>63</sup> Had Augustine had a better sex life — like Justinian who was a "happily married man" — he may never have clung to his doctrine of original sin, Robert Doran argues and Stephen Duffy intimates. Robert Doran, *Birth of a Worldview: Early Christianity in its Jewish and Pagan Context* (Boulder: Westview, 1995), 154; Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology*, New Theology Studies, no. 3 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993), 107. These opinions are most likely drawn from an offhand comment to this effect in Brown, *Body and Society*, 409. Reflecting a classic opinion of Plato's (*Republic* 366a), Elaine Pagels argues that Augustine's doctrine of salvation by grace shows a moral laxity: *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 105-106, 108. Clark thinks Augustine reverts to a hung-over Manichaean dualism: *Ascetic Piety*, 309-17.

fear he feels before law can force a man into slavish obedience by suppressing his urge to disobey. It is virtually impossible to obey the law *without* doing so out of fear, since the punishment wielded by law immediately incites fear at some deep, unconscious level. Yet, although the will can be forced into obedience with law, it would be wrong to view such *acquiescence* as a true demonstration of goodness or — even worse — to mistake obedience for freedom.

Thus we can begin to see the Pauline origins of Augustine's objection to Platonism. The achievement of the wise man — so lambasted by Augustine — rests in his ability to become free and good after having mastered any contrary inclinations within himself. In his *Republic*, Plato argues that the anthropological type that reflects a well-ordered and rational state is an independent man who maintains rulership of his body through mental control. In the just man, the many parts that make up his disparate person are "bound" together so that they are "no longer many." Like the higher, middle and lower notes in a scale, man is bound into one "temperate" and "perfectly adjusted" nature. Thus, "he sets in order his own inner life." When, turning disorder into order, he becomes his own master and his own law," he is free to act.<sup>64</sup> Once the mind has achieved pre-eminence and the body's disobedience has been controlled, the wise man is free to act virtuously. This is the basis for Stoic teaching on *apatheia* and, as we have seen, for Cicero too, the mind proves its constancy with virtue by whipping unruly inclinations into shape. To some degree, Christian teaching about the correct ordering of the emotions — at least in so far as it is revealed in the cut-and-dry distinction between carnal and spiritual grief — reflects this basic Platonist *forma* that a perfect order maintained through the imposition of internal law provides the correct disposition for truly free action. Like Plato's famous description of the self-motivated eternal soul as "unborn," Gregory of Nyssa describes how: "We are in some manner our own parents, giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice in accordance with whatever we wish to be."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Republic* 443d; translated in Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 298.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. A. T. Malherbe and E. Ferguson, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 2; cited in Robert Slesinski, "The Doctrine of Virtue in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*," in *Prayer and Spirituality*, 346. On the unborn soul see Plato, *Phaedrus* 245; this passage is quoted in Cicero, *Tusc. disp.* 1.23.53-54. On the concept of a prime mover in Aristotle see: *On the Soul* 2.3 and 3.5, and on the divine and

Through this kind of “self-control” the mind becomes an administrator of punishment, rather than being the recipient of a punishment derived from some external source. As Plato says, a man becomes “his own law.”<sup>66</sup> As a form of internal regulation, the Platonist method of self-governance reflects precisely those aspects of repressive law critiqued by Paul. In Pauline terms, Augustine teaches that there can be “no perfect peace so long as the vicious propensities are repressed under a rule still troubled by anxiety.”<sup>67</sup> The imposition of law provokes and increases unruly resistance. The violent threat of his mind’s law does not succeed in suppressing Augustine’s tears for his mother, but only creates the build-up of a great well of grief that eventually comes storming out. Augustine grieves even when he knows he shouldn’t because he can’t help himself. The good behaviour that arises out of a forced suppression of the will, such as that stemming from a wise man’s self-control, bears the hallmark of obedience, not of true goodness. Whatever joy is experienced in Platonic contemplation is still born of pain. If a state is made up of citizens who give the appearance of “controlling and checking” their emotions, they are “arrogant and pretentious in their *irreligion (impietate)*.”<sup>68</sup> If, furthermore, the practitioners of *apatheia* are so satisfied with their own achievements — that is, if they have sacrificed their true feelings for obedience so that they “are not stirred by any emotions at all, not swayed or influenced by feelings” — then:

They rather lose every shred of humanity than achieve a true tranquillity. For hardness does not necessarily imply rectitude and insensibility is not a guarantee of health.<sup>69</sup>

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unaffected intellect see *On the Soul* 1.4. Etienne Gilson describes “an essential difference” between Plotinus’ view that the soul itself is divine and Augustine’s view that it is created: *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961), 110.

<sup>66</sup> Plato, *Republic* 443d.

<sup>67</sup> *De civ. Dei* 19.27 (CCSL 48:697): “Et ideo, quamdiu utiis imperatur, plena pax non est, quia et illa quae resistunt periculoso debellantur proelio, et illa quae uicta sunt, nondum securo triumphantur otio, sed adhuc sollicito premuntur imperio.” Translated in Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, ed. David Knowles, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 893.

<sup>68</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.9 (CCSL 48:429-30): “Et si quos ciues habet qui moderari taiibus motibus et eos quasi temperare uideantur, sic impietate superbi et elati sunt ut hoc ipso sint in eis maiores tumores quo minores dolores.”

<sup>69</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.9 (CCSL 48:430): “Et si nonnulli tanto inmaniore quanto rariore uanitate hoc in se ipsis adamauerint ut nullo prorsus erigantur et excitentur, nullo flectantur atque inclinentur affectu, humanitatem totam potius amittunt quam ueram adsequuntur tranquillitatem. Non enim quia durum aliquid, ideo rectum, aut quia stupidum est, ideo sanum.” Trans. Bettenson, 566.

Because it has traded true freedom for obedience, Augustine calls *apatheia* the worst of all *moral* defects.<sup>70</sup> “Who is the person, Lord, who is never carried somewhat beyond the bounds of necessity? Whoever it is, is great, and ‘magnifies your name’” (Ps. 68.31).<sup>71</sup> That man of great soul, Augustine laments, “is not me, because I am a sinful man. Yet I too magnify your name.”<sup>72</sup> As Gillian Evans argues, and as we shall see, for Augustine, freedom is passive:

Ultimately freedom is passive; a Pelagian flexing of psychic muscles cannot achieve a transformed, spontaneous willingness to do the good ... vulnerability, powerlessness is at the heart of the power that is freedom.<sup>73</sup>

### *Paul's Way of Faith*

In advocating the expression of emotion against the controlling violence of reason's mastery, Augustine claims to be renouncing philosophy for *religion*. For Augustine, the difference between a religious man and a philosopher is that one is basically content with an ethics that will get him through this life and the other uses ethics as the means to transcend life. Plato had little to say about eschatology.<sup>74</sup> A philosopher gets over grief in order to get on with life. Becoming “his own law,” he steels the mind against the punishments of suffering and grief with which humanity are afflicted. In its preoccupation with death, religion focuses on a variety of evil that, unlike fear, grief, pain, passion and suffering, no human being can claim to control or legislate against. Until a man can control the ultimate punishment of death, self-discipline will never truly create freedom from fear, nor can a man become “his own law.”

<sup>70</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:428), quoted above p. 35 n. 50.

<sup>71</sup> *Conf.* 10.31.47 (CCSL 27:180): “Quis est, domine, qui non rapiatur aliquantum extra metas necessitatis? Quisquis est, magnus est, ‘magnificet nomen tuum’” (Ps. 68.31).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, “Ego autem non sum, quia peccator homo sum. Sed et ego magnifico nomen tuum ....”

<sup>73</sup> G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), cited in Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace*, 100.

<sup>74</sup> Whilst Socrates admits feeling unease over the encroaching prospect of death, he also has scant patience with the fantastic nightmares of eternal damnation created by the poets and oracles to stoke an irrational fear of death and the religion that is peddled on this basis; see, for example, *Republic* 364-365a.

When Augustine's friend died he realised that death had laid claim to all of life and he felt a terrible, paralysing *fear*; life became a horror to him, a *vita mortalis*, living death.<sup>75</sup> Far from coping with grief to get on with life, he wants to grieve so much that life itself would be finished. Forcibly stopping grief regulates one's reaction to death. But the success or failure of one's internal law in this regard has no impact on the external reality of a much greater law: the human condemnation to death. Where Cicero talks about the uselessness of grieving over circumstances over which one has no control, Augustine argues that the New Testament offers many examples of the *usefulness* of grief that others would call "stupid."<sup>76</sup> No internal buffer-zone can protect Augustine from fear of the punishment of death, a punishment far beyond his "own law."

As we have seen, Augustine's critique of Platonist self-governance is based on the morality of Romans. To understand his formulations of a new religious morality based on the way of faith not law, grace not merit, we must briefly detour to examine the Pauline theology of freedom upon which Augustine's doctrine is based.\*

Life is programmed to one overarching commandment: that from birth, we are commanded to die. "Because of one man's trespass, death reigned ... by the disobedience of one man, many were made into sinners ..." (Rom. 5.17; 5.19 cf., 1 Cor. 15.21). Thus, for Augustine, the deep and perpetual scar of original sin is that "unavoidable death was transmitted into posterity."<sup>77</sup> The fact of death casts all of life into the shadow of a paralysing fear of the one decree of which there is no doubt. The threat of death provokes an overarching fear that infuses human response to all laws, even those that wield ostensibly lesser punishments. As Paul Ricoeur eloquently explains:

Over the interdict there already stretches the shadow of the vengeance which will be paid to it if it is violated. The "thou shalt not" gets its gravity, its weight, from "if not thou shalt die." Thus, the interdict anticipates in itself the

<sup>75</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> For example, *De civ. Dei* 14.8 (CCSL 48:424): "Huic ergo stultitia fuit causa etiam huius utilis optandaeque tristitiae ..." Cf., *Tusc. disp.* 3.28.67.

\* This reading of Romans is my own; it is predicated on my immersion in Augustine.

<sup>77</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.1 (CCSL 48:414): "Tam grande peccatum ut in deterius eo natura mutaretur humana, etiam in posteros obligatione peccati et mortis necessitate transmissa."

chastisement of suffering .... the power of the interdict, in anticipatory fear, is a deadly power.<sup>78</sup>

True freedom from the fear that humanity feels before law must address this ultimate punishment.

The overriding effect of law is death: "The commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7.10).<sup>79</sup> Thus, Paul thinks of Adam's condition in paradise before the advent of law as "true life." Mythically identifying himself with Adam, he says that: "I was once *alive* apart from the law" (Rom. 7.9).<sup>80</sup> Within true life before law, there were no grounds for punishment. Therefore, Adam must have been perfectly good. He was both perfectly good and entirely free from the law, since the law did not yet exist. "Apart from the law, sin lies dead" (Rom. 7.8).

To imitate that condition of perfect goodness, a man would have to demonstrate that he could act well without the law. Although he is constrained by his fear and frustration before the threatening power of law, Paul says that in his "inmost self" he knows and wants what is right (Rom. 7.22). The ambivalence humanity suffers before law is not an entirely bad thing. Although "he cannot do it," Paul can still "will what is right" (Rom. 7.18); he still "delights in the law of God in his inmost self (*secundum interiorem hominem*)" (Rom. 7.22). The mind retains some connection to the original liberty of a condition in which it had no need of law, because it *partly* wants what is right. In so far as the mind wants righteousness, it is still connected to its original spiritual state of true aliveness, even within its fallen condition. "The Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8.9; cf., 1 Cor. 5.3; Phil. 2.2,5).

The central Pauline moral problem is that, under the law, the will is denied the opportunity of exercising the true capacity for goodness that would give it

<sup>78</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Religious Perspectives (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 32-33.

<sup>79</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.15 (CCSL 48:437): "... desertor aeternae uitae etiam aeterna .... morte damnatus." Thus, Augustine opens his argument about original sin with the claim that evidence of prior sin is found in all human beings' predisposition to death, see *De civ. Dei* 14.1 (CCSL 48:414) cited above p. 42 n. 77.

<sup>80</sup> These ideas are mirrored in Augustine's fundamental philosophical view of God as the True Being from which the existence of everything else derives; otherwise expressed as the immutable good, steadfast love etc., e.g., *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:434-35); on the place of undisturbed love see, for example: *De civ. Dei* 14.10 (CCSL 48:430); *Conf.* 4.11.16 (CCSL 27:48); *De trin.*

beyond the effects of punishment. It can either act disobediently, which would in no way liberate it from the expectation of punishment, or it can act obediently, grovelling before the fear of punishment. The latter certainly does not demonstrate an ability for goodness without the law. If he had not been afraid, he may not have bothered to act well at all. Yet, in this life, under the omnipresent threat of death, it is seemingly impossible to obey the law *without* doing so out of fear. How can a man act in agreement with the law whilst, at the same time, acting freely in a way that needs no law?

Christ's crucifixion reveals to his "least" apostle (1 Cor. 15.9) that the way is not through law but through faith (Rom. 5.1; 3.27-28; 4.16; Gal. 3.23-25; Phil. 3.9, et. al.). The only act that proves an entirely independent inclination towards goodness, one that could in no sense be construed as merely obedient, is an act that agrees with the law without being afraid of the law. And since there is one punishment that is feared more than any other, proof of acting free of fear must confront this most fearful punishment and no other. Only through his suicide does a man demonstrate his freedom from the ultimate compulsory "thou shalt" power of the law.

Paradoxically, the one act in which true self-will is demonstrated is an act in which "not my will but Thine" is done (Matth. 26.39). Surrendering to the ultimate punishment, Christ acts in unison with the will of the law (Rom. 8.1-10.4; Matth. 5.17) since it is decreed that man shall die. But in doing so *voluntarily* instead of being compelled, he demonstrates a truer freedom than any act of goodness that is still motivated by fear.

The difference between obedience and freedom is like the difference between forcing yourself out of bed in the morning when the alarm sounds, drinking enough coffee to stay awake, racing to get to work without being late, making sure you drive well enough to avoid an accident ... and jumping off a cliff. There is no comparison between the goodness forged of obedience and the freedom of death. Paul's revolutionary ideal of freedom of choice involves the enactment of the one choice that frees man from all future choices.<sup>81</sup> For Paul,

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10.8.11 (CCSL 50:441); this is also what Augustine means by the *vita beata*, e.g., *Conf.* 10.21.31 (CCSL 27:172), see Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, chapter one.

<sup>81</sup> Thus, in a sense, both Arendt's opinion that Paul was the first great philosophical advocate of freedom of choice and Neil Ormerod's view that Paul's freedom of choice is "freedom from

Christ enacts the spirit of life enjoyed by Adam before law by acting in a way that truly shows that he can be good without law, demonstrating that no threat of punishment compelled him to obedience.

### *Augustine's Way of Love*

In the end the worst resolves into harmony with the better, God whom every creature capable of loving, loves, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Augustine, *Soliloquies*

The peculiarly Christian path revealed by the cross is one in which the will's freedom is necessarily coincidental to its punishment. Augustine often presents this paradoxical path — especially in contrast with the seemingly straightforward way of the Stoics or the Platonists — as a path of reversal, antithesis, paradox and mystery. “There is something in humility, (of which Christ is King, [Phil. 2.8-11]),” he says, “that uplifts the heart and there is something in exaltation that abases the heart.”<sup>82</sup> The idea that true freedom is demonstrated in taking on the greatest punishment is indeed a strange and mysterious way to salvation. Augustine's self-portrait is a tragic figure.<sup>83</sup> We find that the cure for sickness is halfway between the two opposite poles of health and sickness, Augustine teaches; unless it has something in common with the sickness it will not lead to health.<sup>84</sup>

Like Paul, Augustine reacts with ambivalence before law. He knows that it is wrong to weep over his mother's death. He himself teaches that: “So often if

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choice” are reconcilable and, in my opinion, both correct. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:68. Neil Ormerod, *Grace and Disgrace: A Theology of Self-Esteem, Society and History* (Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1992), 4.

<sup>82</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:435): “Est igitur aliquid humilitatis miro modo quod sursum faciat cor, et est aliquid elationis quod deorsum faciat cor.”

<sup>83</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 127; Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:90.

someone's son dies, then she will weep for him, but if he should sin, she will not weep over him. When she sees him sinning, then she should weep and grieve over him."<sup>85</sup> But, failing to heed his own advice, he finds that he cannot restrain the love he has felt and still feels for his mother and the will of his love prevails over his rational implementation of law. Arendt argues that Paul was the first philosopher to view the will's freedom in a human being's ability to say "yes" or "no" regardless of circumstance.<sup>86</sup> It is about a liberation of that part of man that despite all the constraints of circumstance is able to say: "No!" Paul views the human ability to want something independent of the law's demands as the Spirit of true life that existed before the advent of law and the punishment of death. When Augustine wants to grieve for Monica — regardless of law — his inclination expresses something of the Spirit of freedom that Paul is talking about. For Augustine, indeed, all feelings of love do so.

Augustine describes the behaviour of an infant, for example, as full of inexpressible and irrepressible needs, or loves. For Plato, moral discipline makes a man of the child because it trains him to resist the impulse to cry at life's every bump.<sup>87</sup> In Augustine's portrayal of infancy, although the infant is not yet governed by reason or equipped for moral choice, it still feels strong desires. Even before a child knows how to speak, it knows what it wants; Augustine's pre-verbal child is filled with inexpressible needs.<sup>88</sup> If he behaved as an adult as he did as a baby, demanding whatever he coveted with the force of his tears, he would be very justly reprimanded! But, he asks:

Was I sinning in this? Because I coveted the breast with my crying? Certainly if I did that now ... I would be laughed at and most justly reprehended. And then I was indeed reprehensible, but because I was unable to understand the person who reprehended me, neither custom nor reason allowed me to be reprehended.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> *De trin.* 4.18.24 (CCSL 50:904): "Sanitas enim a morbo plurimum distat, sed media curatio nisi morbo congruat non perducit ad sanitatem."

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (henceforth cited as *Enarr. in Ps.*) 37.24 (CCSL 38:398): "... et tamen plerumque si filius cuiusquam moriatur, plangit illum; si peccet, non illum plangit. Tunc plangeret, tunc doleret, cum peccantem videret."

<sup>86</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:68.

<sup>87</sup> Plato, *Republic* 604c-d.

<sup>88</sup> *Conf.* 1.6.8 (CCSL 27:4): As a baby, Augustine describes how "uoluntates meas uolebam ostendere eis ... et non poteram, quia illae intus erant"; see also *De trin.* 14.5.7 (CCSL 50A:429).

<sup>89</sup> *Conf.* 1.7.11 (CCSL 27:6): "Quid ergo tunc peccabam? An quia uberibus inhiabam plorans? Nam si nunc faciam ... deridebor atque reprehendar iustissime. Tunc ergo reprehendenda

Augustine's irrational infant, who cannot understand the difference between right and wrong, exists in a state before the advent of law. Before language shaped his habits, the infant was unable to be reprehended. The spiritual man becomes like an infant in Christ, returning to the strong natural impulses of love.<sup>90</sup>

Although all feelings of human love express some remnant of the spirit of freedom that existed before law, not all acts of love will liberate man from fear and thus fully provide the freedom of paradise. To be entirely freed from punishment, Adam must not only want to act and thereby exercise freedom of choice, he must choose to act in a way that warrants no punishment. Saying "No!" to punishment in order to be disobedient perpetuates the power of the law by re-enacting the very circumstance that gave rise to the law. Instead, Adam must say "No!" to punishment in a way that liberates the will from its fear of the law once and for all. Augustine's tears for Monica or his infantile, tearful coveting of the breast express the *inclination* that is the *means* to freedom. But tears that express these acts of love do not make him free.

When Augustine's friend died, his many tears gave voice to the enormous feeling of love that was awakened in him. But he also experienced a terrible fear of death. Elsewhere, Augustine defines fear as the love that "avoids what confronts it."<sup>91</sup> Feeling fear, Augustine experienced a love that is avoiding something. Augustine's love was avoiding the fact of total loss implied by death. Physical love is an attachment to mortals. When a loved one dies, love is thrown into a state of fear, a state in which it desperately avoids something that confronts it. A fear of death? Yes, but also more. A fear of the death of love. Love avoids confronting its own death: the reality that in entering this life, love had already died.

As Cicero teaches, life's deepest sting of grief gives us an insight into the true knowledge of our condition — a condition that we were already experiencing but failed to be aware of. Augustine, as we have seen, was particularly impressed by this area of Cicero's philosophy — he described the *Hortensius* as a book

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faciebam, sed quia reprehendentem intellegere non poteram, nec mos reprehendi me nec ratio sinebat."

<sup>90</sup> *De trin.* 1.1.3. (CCSL, 50:30), cited below p. 52 n. 109.

<sup>91</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.7 (CCSL, 48:422): "Anxior ergo inhians habere quod amatur cupiditas est, id autem habens eoque fruens laetitia; fugiens quod ei aduersatur timor est, idque, si acciderit sentiens tristitia est."

which immediately changed his life (unlike the Bible which he only gradually learnt to appreciate).<sup>92</sup> But where Cicero teaches that the lesson of the deep sting is the detachment of becoming, like a rock, unable to feel anything any more, Augustine cannot deny either his fear or his grief. And reading Paul one day in a garden in Milan, he finds an answer.

Reading Paul, Augustine learns that freedom of the will comes from experiencing what it fears — confronting what it avoids. “The love that avoids what confronts it is fear,”<sup>93</sup> Augustine teaches, “and the love that feels it when it strikes is grief.” For Paul, the will is liberated when, in the suicide of self-emptying (Phil. 2.7), it overcomes its fear of death by embracing it, feeling the full force of its strike. Through doing the will of the law without being forced to do so by his fear of punishment, Christ is reunited with the Spirit of freedom that had no need of law. Demonstrating free goodness, He is beyond the effects of punishment and has been resurrected to “eternal life.” Augustine wants to resurrect love to a condition of freedom in which it felt no fear. To do so, he must experience the love “that feels the strike of what it fears” — that is, grief. Instead of feeling the fear he felt when his friend died, a fear in which he avoided knowledge, he must embrace the full pain of the reality of deserted love. Then finally he may be freed once and for all of his inner dread of deserted love, a fearful punishment that keeps him slavishly running from one doomed attachment to the next.

### *The Inner Crucifixion*

The soul became weak and dark, with the result that it was miserably dragged down from itself to things that are not what it is and are lower than itself by loves that it cannot master and confusions it can see no way out of. From these depths it now cries out to God’s mercy repenting with the Psalms: “My strength has deserted me, the light of my eyes is no longer with me” (Ps. 37.11).<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Describing the *Hortensius*, Augustine says in *Conf.* 3.4.7 (CCSL 27:30): “... ille uero liber mutauit affectum meum ....”

<sup>93</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.7 (CCSL 48:422), quoted above p. 47 n. 91.

<sup>94</sup> *De trin.* 14.14.18 (CCSL 50A:446-447): “... infirma et tenebrosa facta est ut a se quoque ipsa in ea quae non sunt quod ipsa et quibus superior est ipsa infeliciter laboretur per amores quos non

As Cuthbert Butler demonstrated long ago, some of Augustine's most mystical writings are expressed in the language of the Psalms.<sup>95</sup> And it is through the Psalms that Augustine gives voice to the "inner crucifixion" in which the "still mortal body" is resuscitated to life.<sup>96</sup> Focusing on his visionary experiences, scholars have overlooked the mystical experience in which Augustine's penitence *becomes the light*.<sup>97</sup> "Do penitence" (Matth. 3.2; 4.17) he calls, and, "Let there be light!" (Gen. 1.3)<sup>98</sup> Unlike Paul, who advocates literal death in imitation of Christ, and very likely died for his cause,<sup>99</sup> Augustine says that the liberation of the "outer man" is something that will take place after our bodily death, in the Second Coming of Christ. But there is also a crucifixion of the inner man which is "a kind of death to erase the death of ungodliness, in which God leaves us."<sup>100</sup> The psychological distress Christ suffered on the cross when he cried, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" (Matth. 27.46), serves as a sacrament for an inner rebirth, which can be imitated by tears of repentance experienced in the depths of the heart.<sup>101</sup>

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ualet uincere et errores a quibus non uidet qua redire. Unde iam deo miserante poenitens clamat in psalmis, 'Deseruit me fortitudo mea et lumen oculerum meorum non est mecum'" (Ps. 37.11).

<sup>95</sup> Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 3rd ed. (London: Constable, 1967), 21-24.

<sup>96</sup> *De trin.* 4.3.5 (CCSL 50:165); quoted below p. 52 n. 116.

<sup>97</sup> Butler notes that Augustine "gives utterance to the sorrow felt by mystics at the loss of the supreme experience and the longing where-by they are consumed for its renewal"; *Western Mysticism*, 47-48. Referring to *Conf.* 7.17.23, McGinn also only notes the experience of sorrow associated with Augustine's mystical experiences in this context, i.e., as an expression of the *after-effect* of supernal vision; McGinn, *Presence of God*, 1:237, 240, 245.

<sup>98</sup> *Conf.* 13.12.13 (CCSL 27:248), full text cited below p. 53 n. 121.

<sup>99</sup> Phil. 1.21: "Mihi enim vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum." On legends of Paul's martyrdom in Rome see Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 175-6. See Acts 21.17-28, 31. McGinn notes the poignancy of the martyrdom theme in Romans; *The Presence of God*, 1:80-82.

<sup>100</sup> *De trin.* 4.3.6 (PL 42:891): "Crucifixio quippe interioris hominis poenitentiae dolores intelleguntur ... per quam mortem mors impietatis perimitur in qua nos relinquit Deus." Unlike the PL edition which has "in qua nos relinquit Deus," the CCSL edition reads (50:167): "... in qua nos non relinquit Deus." Hill has opted for this version in his translation "in which God does not leave us." In *The Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. 5, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City, 1991), 156. However, since Augustine is referring to Christ's words in Matthew, "... quid me dereliquisti?" (Matth. 27.46), I prefer the idea of the death of the soul as "nos relinquit Deus."

<sup>101</sup> *De trin.* 4.3.6 (PL 42:891): "Interioris enim hominis nostri sacramento data est illa vox pertinens ad mortem animae nostrae significandam non solum in psalmo uerum etiam in cruce: 'Deus meus, deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?'" (Ps. 21.1; Matth. 27.46) Augustine also refers to the renovation of the inner man through repentance in his *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 36.2 (CCSL 44A:56): "... ut caritatis libertas praec seruitute timoris emineat. Tunc iam persuadendum est fidelibus praecedentibus regenerationis sacramentis, quae necesse est plurimum moueant, quid intersit inter duos homines, ueterem et nouum, exteriorem et interiorem, terrenum et coelestem, id est, inter eum qui bona carnalia et temporalia, et eum qui spiritualia et aeterna

Immediately prior to his conversion, Lady Contenance instructs Augustine to: "Cast yourself upon Him, do not be afraid! He will not withdraw himself so that you fall. Make the leap without anxiety; he will catch you and heal you."<sup>102</sup> Augustine's description of tears of conversion in the Milanese garden is only one of many versions of tears as inner crucifixion found throughout his writings. In Milan he describes how:

A profound self-examination dredged up, from a hidden depth, all of my misery and poured it out in sight of my heart. A huge storm arose in me bearing a huge downpour of tears .... I somehow managed to throw myself down under some kind of fig tree and I let out the necessary tears, my eyes erupted into rivers, a sacrifice "acceptable to you" (Ps. 50.19). I called out in a voice of misery: "How long, how long, tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not put an end to my uncertainties this very hour?"<sup>103</sup>

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sectatur ..." [... so that the freedom of charity might stand out in comparison with the bondage of fear. Then, after the faithful have received the sacraments of regeneration, and these should be deeply moving, they must be clearly shown the difference between two men: the old and the new, the outer and the inner, the earthly and the heavenly, between the one who pursues spiritual and eternal goods.] Translated in Saint Augustine, *Eighty-three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 70 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 69. On the soul suffering a necessary death, see *De doct. Christ.* 1.19.18 (CCSL 32:16) and *De doct. Christ.* 1.20.19 (CCSL 32:16). Augustine's description of the "dark night of the soul" is another treatment of deepest repentance in *De trin.* 14.14.18 (CCSL 50A:446-447), quoted above, p. 48 n. 94; see also *De trin.* 4.1.1 (CCSL 50:159), quoted below, p. 53 n. 119. As McGinn points out, Ambrose's treatise *On Death as a Good* introduced the theme of three deaths to Latin literature: a natural death, "the separation of body and soul, a morally indifferent matter; the penal and evil death that takes place through sin; and the *mors mystica*, that is the good death by means of which we die to sin by rejecting it"; *Presence of God* 1:207. This may be an important basis for Augustine's doctrine. We have seen Augustine's distinction between natural and penal death in *Enarr. in Ps.* 37.24 (CCSL 38:398) (cited above p. 46 n. 85), and Augustine's inner crucifixion may be his version of Ambrose's *mors mystica*, itself, McGinn notes, inherited from Origen.

<sup>102</sup> *Conf.* 8.11.27 (CCSL 27:130): "Proice te in eum, noli metuere; non se subtrahet, ut cadas; proice te securus, excipiet et sanabit te." Trans. Chadwick, 151.

<sup>103</sup> *Conf.* 8.12.28 (CCSL 27:130-31): "Ubi uero a fundo arcano alta consideratio traxit et congescit totam miseriam meam in conspectu cordis mei, oborta est procella ingens ferens ingentem imbrem lacrimarum.... Ego sub quadam fici arbore strauit me nescio quomodo et dimisi habenas lacrimis, et proruperunt flumina oculorum meorum, acceptabile sacrificium tuum (Ps. 50.19).... lactabam uoces miserabiles: 'quamdiu, quamdiu, 'cras et cras'? Quare non modo? Quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meae?'" Possibly no passage from Augustine's entire oeuvre has been so closely scrutinised and interpreted as the conversion scene in the garden at Milan (*Conf.* 8.12). However, the significance of Augustine's tears in this scene has been somewhat neglected. In the famous dispute over Augustine's orthodoxy in 386-87 (summarised by Courcelle and Leo Ferrari), it appears that when Augustine's tears are mentioned they are treated as token (or reality) of his religiosity and Catholicism and an aspect of his devotion and humility; *Recherches sur les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950), 7-12; *The Conversions of St. Augustine* (Villanova Pa.: Villanova University Press, 1984), 56-59. Courcelle notes the similarity of accounts of Augustine's weeping in *On the Good Life* and *On the Soul*; *Recherches*, 189. Augustine also sheds tears in *Soliloquies* 2.1 (PL 32:885). Since, unlike the *Confessions* (which was written in 397), these works are contemporaneous with Augustine's conversion, it seems that in the debate over the historicity of this scene, tears are not at issue. Courcelle's microscopic

Elsewhere he cries out: "My God, where are you?" (Ps. 41.4) and finds himself "sighing for you a little" (Job 32.20) when I pour out my soul upon myself."<sup>104</sup> But, as when he became a great problem to himself, his distress runs yet deeper. "Our soul was disturbed within ourselves .... Our darkness displeased us."<sup>105</sup> "My soul is sad because it slips back and becomes an abyss, or rather it feels itself still to be an abyss."<sup>106</sup> "Abyss" still "calls to abyss" (Ps. 41.8) .... Weighted down he groans (2 Cor. 5.4), 'his soul thirsts for the living God like a hart for the springs of waters,' and he says, 'When shall I come?'" (Ps. 41.2-3)<sup>107</sup> And back to the Milanese garden we find:

And not in these exact words, but very much in this sense, I said to you: "How long, O Lord? (Ps. 6.4) How long will you be angry to the utmost? Do not be mindful of our old iniquities" (Ps. 78.5, 8).<sup>108</sup>

The abyss can be reached by a return to infancy. Those who are reborn through grace are "like babies in Christ" who drink milk, not solid food (1 Cor. 3.1-12).<sup>109</sup>

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treatment of the literary tropes of the scene in the garden, amazingly, treats everything but the tears in great detail; *Recherches*, 188-190; see also "*Confessions*" *dans la tradition littéraire*. Like Courcelle, Ferrari also pays little attention to the significance of tears in the conversion scene. Ferrari's summary of scholarly interest in the scene concurs with its overwhelming focus that "it is undeniable that the *tolle lege* episode is the grand climax of the entire autobiography of the work"; *Conversions*, 56. Weeping is often regarded as Augustine's "concession" to Catholic tenets at odds with his rationalist character. Brian Stock sees the *tolle lege* as the event of "verbal communication" (characteristic of the effusive and articulate Augustine) overtaking emotional communication; *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 344 n. 199. Astell also describes Augustine's weeping as a "concession" that goes against the grain of his rationalist nature; *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 123-24. The general attention to Monica's weeping perhaps masks a certain blindness towards Augustine's own tears. (E.g., Courcelle's attention to Monica's tears in "*Confessions*" *dans la tradition littéraire*, 274-275, and McGinn's attention to Augustine's depiction of Monica as *anima* — Augustine does not need to have Monica present at Ostia to indicate that the feminine aspect of the soul, *anima*, partakes of mystical vision; Augustine gives ample evidence of his own *anima*; *Presence of God*, 1:234).

<sup>104</sup> *Conf.* 13.11.15 (CCSL 27:250): "Et ego dico: 'Deus meus ubi est?' (Ps. 41.4) ... Respiro in te paululum (Job 32.20), cum effundo super me animam meam ...."

<sup>105</sup> *Conf.* 13.12.13 (CCSL 27:248): "... conturbata erat ad nos ipsos anima nostra ... et displicuerunt nobis tenebrae nostrae ...."

<sup>106</sup> *Conf.* 13.14.15 (CCSL 27:250): "Et adhuc tristis est, quia relabitur et fit abyssus, uel potius sentit adhuc se esse abyssum."

<sup>107</sup> *Conf.* 13.13.14 (CCSL 27:249): "... adhuc abyssus abyssum inuocat (Ps. 41.8) ... et ingemescit grauatus (2 Cor. 5.4), et 'silit anima eius ad deum uiuum, quemadmodum cerui ad fontes aquarum,' et dicit: 'quando ueniam?'" (Ps. 41.2-3)

<sup>108</sup> *Conf.* 8.12.28 (CCSL 27:131): "... et non quidem his uerbis, sed in hac sententia multa dixi tibi 'et tu, domine, usquequo?' (Ps. 6.4) Usquequo, domine, irasceris in finem? Ne memor fueris iniquitatumstrarum antiquarum'" (Ps. 78.5, 8).

To the lower abyss he calls in the words, "Be not conformed to this world, but be reformed to the newness of your mind" (Rom. 12.2), and: "Be not boys in mind *but be infants in malice that you may be fully adult (perfecti) in mind!*" (1 Cor. 14.20) ... The cataracts of his gifts were open (Mal. 3.10) so that "the flood water of the river made glad your city" (Ps. 45.5).<sup>110</sup>

Rivers streamed from my eyes ... And I cried out in the voice of misery ...

Augustine receives the "food of the fully grown" only in the context of the charity through which he comes to know the light. Love comes to know the light through sighing "to you 'day and night'" (Ps. 1.2), and hearing in the way that one hears in the heart.<sup>111</sup> Augustine associates his tears with the weakness of Christ which was "meant to teach that ... in their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which rises and lifts them up."<sup>112</sup> "The word was made flesh" (Joan. 1.14), Augustine explains, "so that our infant condition might come *to suck milk from your wisdom.*"<sup>113</sup> Augustine "sees" only through sucking the milk, through subjection to Christ to be nourished on love.<sup>114</sup>

As Robert O'Connell points out, Augustine's leap of faith is a "childlike surrender."<sup>115</sup> As an inner crucifixion, Augustine's tears rebirth him. The conversion will be a resuscitation of the soul by repentance, in which the "still mortal body" is renewed in life.<sup>116</sup> Repentance will involve the trauma proper to birth and the crucifixion but, as the Old Testament so often teaches, suffering, like birth, will be plentiful.

<sup>109</sup> *De trin.* 1.1.3 (CCSL 50:30): "... carnalibus et animalibus, tamquam paruulis in Christo (1 Cor. 3.1)."

<sup>110</sup> *Conf.* 13.13.14 (CCSL 27:249): "... uocat inferiorem abyssum dicens: 'Nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed reformamini in nouitate mentis uestrae' (Rom. 12.2), et: 'Nolite pueri effici mentibus, sed malitia paruuli estote, ut mentibus perfecti sitis' (1 Cor. 14.20) ... et aperuit cataractas donorum suorum, ut 'fluminis impetus lactificarent ciuitatem tuam'" (Ps. 45.5).

<sup>111</sup> *Conf.* 7.10.16 (CCSL 27:103): "... charitas nouit eam [lux] ... tibi suspire 'die ac nocte'" (Ps. 1.2).

<sup>112</sup> *Conf.* 7.18.24 (CCSL 27:108): "... ante pedes suos infirmam diuinitatem ... et lassii prosternerentur in eam, illa autem surgens leuaret eos."

<sup>113</sup> *Conf.* 7.18.24 (CCSL 27:108): "... quoniam uerbum caro factum est, ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia tua."

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, "... ad se traiceret, sanans tumorem et nutriens amorem ...."

<sup>115</sup> O'Connell, *Augustine's "Confessions,"* 103.

<sup>116</sup> *De trin.* 4.3.5 (CCSL 50:165): "Resuscitatur ergo anima per paenitentiam, et in corpore adhuc mortali renouatio uitae inchoatur a fide ...."

There is hope in the depths: "Because your spirit was carried over the waters, your mercy did not abandon our misery."<sup>117</sup> "Make the leap with faith," the Lady of a new fertility counsels, "For you will not fall." In his grief-stricken confusion after the death of his friend, Augustine implores his God to help him understand. Although his soul does not know what to reply to his questions he utters some confidence when he says, "Yet if our tearful entreaties did not reach your ears, no remnant of hope would remain for us."<sup>118</sup> He describes how his tears became sweet, replacing the delight his mind formerly took in the love he shared with his friend. He asks, "Why it is that weeping is sweet to us when we are unhappy?" Elsewhere, he describes how the sinner finds it "sweet to weep and implore Him over and over again to take pity and pull him altogether out of his pitiful condition, and he prays with all his confidence" with prayers that express "the sorrow of the exile stirred by longing for his true country and its founder, his blissful God."<sup>119</sup>

When we were disturbed within ourselves, we remembered you Lord.<sup>120</sup>  
Penitence became the light.

Because your spirit was carried over the waters, your mercy did not abandon our misery, and you said, "Let there be light!" (Gen. 1.3) "Do penitence, for the Kingdom of heaven has drawn near!" (Matth. 3.2, 4.17) "Do penitence"; "Let there be light."<sup>121</sup>

Augustine discovered long ago that tears are sweet because in tears painful memories are forgotten.<sup>122</sup> "Perfection in this life is nothing but forgetting what lies behind, and stretching out intently to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3.13).<sup>123</sup>

Long thou for this light: for a certain fountain, a certain light, such as thy bodily eyes know not; a light, to see which the inward eye must be prepared:

<sup>117</sup> *Conf.* 13.12.13 (CCSL 27:248): "...quia spiritus tuus superferebatur super aquam, non reliquit miseriam nostram misericordia tua ...."

<sup>118</sup> *Conf.* 4.5.10 (CCSL 27:44): "Et tamen nisi ad aures tuas ploraremus, nihil residui de spe nostra fieret."

<sup>119</sup> *De trin.* 4.1.1 (CCSL 50:159): "... flere dulce habet et eum deprecari ut etiam atque etiam misereatur donec exuat totam miseriam, et precari cum fiducia ... dolorem peregrinationis suae ex desiderio patriae suae et conditoris eius beati dei sui." Trans. Hill, 152 and mine.

<sup>120</sup> *Conf.* 13.12.13 (CCSL 27:248): "... commemorati sumus tui, domine."

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*: "... quia spiritus tuus superferebatur super aquam, non reliquit miseriam nostram misericordia tua, et dixisti: 'fiat lux' (Gen. 1.3); 'paenitentiam agite, appropinquavit enim regnum caelorum' (Matth. 23.2; 4.17). 'Paenitentiam agite'; 'Fiat lux.'"

<sup>122</sup> *Conf.* 4.5.10 (CCSL 27:45), cited above p. 27 n. 9.

<sup>123</sup> *De trin.* 9.1.1 (CCSL 50:292-93): "Perfectionem in hac uita dicit non aliud quam ea quae retro sunt obliuisci, et in ea quae ante sunt extendi secundum intentionem" (Phil. 3.13).

... run to the fountain, long for the fountain! ... Having sought to find His Substance in myself, and found him not, I perceive my God to be something higher than my soul. Therefore that I might attain unto him, "I thought on these things, and poured out my soul above myself."<sup>124</sup>

In Milan, Augustine's tears poured out all of his misery "in sight of his heart." If the soul is not poured out, emptied of itself, "it would not attain what is beyond itself, it would instead rest in itself, it would not see anything beyond itself."<sup>125</sup> "I have poured forth my soul above myself," let out all of the pain and memory of sin, let out, indeed, memory itself as a deceptive tool of time-ordered, limited existence, all of the artifices of the region of unlikeness, all washed away in a huge internal storm which allows desire, like the void and vacuum effect, to suck God into its emptiness; "There remains no longer any being for me to attain to save my God."<sup>126</sup> "As I rise above memory ... so I shall ascend beyond memory to touch Him ... I shall rise beyond it to move towards you, sweet light."<sup>127</sup>

Augustine's mysticism of desire is accomplished by an inner crucifixion in which, through his tears, his love feels the fearful strike of the realisation that it has died. Desire is not like Adam's and Eve's experience of fulfilled love. It is instead only the experience of lack of love. Augustine's tears express the *vita mortalis* of a love of which the only premise of life resides in the knowledge of its death.

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<sup>124</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 41.2 (CCSL 38:461): "Lumen hoc desidera, quemdam fontem, quoddam lumen quale non norunt oculi tui; cui lumini uidendo oculus interior praeparatur ... Curre ad fontem, desidera fontem ...." *Enarr. in Ps.* 41.8 (CCSL 38:465): "... quaerens eius substantiam in meipso ... neque hoc inueniens, aliquid super animam esse sentio Deum meum. Ergo, nisi eum tangerem. Haec meditatus sum, et effudi super me animam meam." Trans. Butler, 21-22.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*: "Quando anima mea contingeret quod super animam meam quaeritur, nisi anima mea super seipsam effunderetur? Si enim in seipsa remaneret, nihil aliud quam se uideret ...."

<sup>126</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 41.8 (CCSL 38:466): "... effudi super me animam meam" (Ps. 41.5); et non iam restat quem tangam, nisi Deum meum." Gilson puts it nicely: "Truth comes from God and since it is truer to say that we are in God than that God is in us, the Augustinian soul passes through itself so to speak, on its way to meet the divine master and thus passes through itself only to go beyond"; *Christian Philosophy*, 76.

<sup>127</sup> *Conf.* 10.17.26 (CCSL 27:169): "Transibo ... memoriam, ut attingam eum ... transibo eam ut pertendam ad te, dulce lumen."

For Augustine, grief, the emotional experience of feeling loss, is redeemed because it is an essential part of coming to know oneself as created by love. Feeling the empty longing of tears of desire is testament to the divine pull of love, a pull known only through feeling the nadir of lost love. Surrendering to this emotional vacuum returns humanity to its strongest natural urge and thus frees the will from the constraints of obedience and allows it to realise its full expression in the painful yet sustainingly hopeful awareness of its desire.

2 Cor. 12.9: I am perpetually pierced and tormented by a spine of sin so that I learn that not spiritual gifts but weakness is sufficient for grace.

Augustine's denial of the human ability to achieve self-perfection and his insistence on grace has been interpreted as suggesting the extreme possibility that a sinner may be saved where a morally good man may not. This criticism, however, could only be made by a Pelagius — i.e. someone who believes in the possibility of a "good man." Seeing how Augustine's insistence on original sin is related to the mystical significance of *emotional movability* puts a different slant on the question of Augustine's pessimism, especially in so far as it pertains to the question of whether or not he is a mystic. His denial of a certain kind of human perfection is not his bulwark against mysticism, but his precondition for it. Equally, his denial of human self-perfection is the precondition for the birth of goodness. Interpreting love as the basis of moral goodness necessarily denies humanity *independent* moral competence. This is not, however, a denial of the human capacity for freedom. Rather than defining freedom in the mirroring of divine detachment, tears express the inalienably human freedom of feeling one's deep need for attachment. Just as Paul views Christ's crucifixion as the only truly free act because it overcomes the fear of death that enslaves humanity, so for Augustine, tears of crucifixion confront humanity's greatest metaphysical fear — the greatest fear for a being defined by its love. In these tears love realises its death. But paradoxically, the only way that it knows that it was once alive is through realising that it is now dead. The pain of grief one feels in the knowledge of love's death is a flicker of desire for the life love once had. This flicker of desire for life is the light in the darkness. Although Augustine has much to say on

how mystical grace translates into the grace of charity, we shall return to this aspect of his thought as it is taken up by later medieval theologians.



Fig. 2 *Christo*, wooden statue, 1236, reprinted from *Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria - Dipinti, Sculture e oggetti d'arte di età romanica e gotica*, Cataloghi dei musei e gallerie d'Italia (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato P.V., 1969), fig. 112a.

## *Anselm of Canterbury: "Our Burden is Light"*

Anselm of Canterbury is, to my mind, a great philosopher of suffering. Yet, for reasons that will soon become apparent, he has not received due recognition as such. In this chapter, I shall interpret Anselm in two novel ways. Firstly, I shall interpret his famous doctrine of atonement *not* primarily as the basis for a theory of salvation through merit — cash in the collective bank of goodness from which Christians may dutifully earn a withdrawal — but as the very opposite: namely a theory of salvation through grace. We shall see that the doctrine of atonement is a theory about the nature of giving, not earning. In this respect, Anselm is concerned with the same Pauline moral issue of the difference between Christ's freedom and the slavish obedience that so deeply influenced his intellectual mentor, Augustine. Anselm views both giving and obligatory payment as two forms of suffering — suffering being broadly defined to encompass any "loss to the self" such as the loss that occurs when we make a payment or give. Thus his concern to distinguish grace from merit, a gift from a payment, is expressed in a philosophy of suffering. His doctrine of atonement addresses the question of how human suffering can be more than a payment, how it can become a gift. The first tier of my interpretation focuses on readings of *Cur Deus homo?* and the "Meditation on Human Redemption." The second tier is built around the question of how Christ's gift of suffering may be imitated. The significance of weeping in the spirituality of Anselm's prayers provides a possible answer to this question.

*Well Connected*

“The flaw in the Christ stories,” said the visitor from outer space, “was that Christ, who didn’t look like much, was actually the Son of the Most Powerful Being in the Universe. Readers understood that, so, when they came to the crucifixion, they naturally thought, and Rosewater read out loud again: “Oh boy — they sure picked the wrong guy to lynch that time!”

And that thought had a brother: “There are right people to lynch.” Who? People not well connected. So it goes.

The visitor from outer space made a gift to Earth of a new Gospel. In it, Jesus really was a nobody, and a pain in the neck to a lot of people with better connections than he had. He still got to say all the lovely and puzzling things he said in the other Gospels.

So the people amused themselves one day by nailing him to a cross and planting the cross in the ground. There couldn’t possibly be any repercussions the lynchers thought. The reader would have to think that, too, since the new Gospel hammered home again and again what a nobody Jesus was.

And then, just before the nobody died, the heavens opened up, and there was a crash of thunder and lightning. The voice of God came crashing down. He told people that he was adopting the bum as his son, giving him the full powers and privileges of the Son of the Creator of the Universe throughout all eternity. God said this: “From this moment on, He will punish anybody who torments a bum who has no connections!”

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Kurt Vonnegut’s delightful telling of the conventional crucifixion story — in which Jesus is so well connected that God (who is really his Father) comes to his rescue while leaving the rest of humanity to their fates — and his outer-space visitor’s revised version of it as a story in which God rescues a real nobody illustrates both the conventional reading of Anselm of Canterbury’s doctrine of atonement and a humanist side to it that, despite its lack of recognition, is not really so alien from Anselm that it needs to arrive by spaceship. The Western medieval origins of the theme of Christ’s motherhood in the prayers of Anselm of Canterbury is an indication that the humanism associated with this teaching in the twelfth century is already an important and integral aspect of Anselm’s thought.<sup>1</sup> Yet, because Anselm’s doctrine of atonement is regarded as a paradigmatic

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out Anselm’s important innovations on this theme in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 111-15.

rendering of the “well-connected” Christ story, Anselm’s writings, indeed, even his whole mentality, have been cast in definitive distinction to the twelfth-century arrival of a more humanist reading of the crucifixion, and even of humanism itself.

Like Vonnegut, but in rather more detail, John Bossy also gives an entertaining characterisation of Anselm’s doctrine of atonement as a salvatory deal:

In the Garden of Eden, it went, Adam and Eve had disobeyed God. In so doing they had erected between themselves and Him a state of offence which had entailed their exclusion from paradise; this state had been transmitted to their descendants. God, according to justice, could not cease to be offended, or restore man to his favour, until a compensation had been paid and His honour repaired. Man therefore owed a debt of restitution to God, but had not the wherewithal to pay it, since the whole world would not have sufficed to compensate for the offence, and man had nothing to offer which was not God’s anyway.

Only God himself could satisfy the debt; but since the satisfaction was owed by man, a lawful offer of it could only be made by someone who was both God and man ... Out of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, for us men and for our salvation, the Son had taken upon Himself to be born among the generation of Adam and Eve, and to offer spontaneously to the Father the death to which He was not subject in due satisfaction for the offence of His kin. And just as the offence of Adam and Eve was so great that the whole world was inadequate to compensate for it, so the weight of compensation which Christ might claim for His death was more than the whole world might ever contain. Not needing it himself, He asked the Father that the debt be transferred to His fellow men, which the Father could not in justice refuse. So man was able at length to make satisfaction, to abolish the state of offence between himself and God, and to be restored to favour and future beatitude.<sup>2</sup>

Both the tenor and the details of Bossy’s telling are true to the nature and character of Anselm’s doctrine. Anselm himself tells it in this way: as a myth.<sup>3</sup> As if God were motivated by ambition of profit, Anselm asks Him: “‘What profit is there for You in my blood’ (Ps. 29.10), if I go down to eternal corruption?”<sup>4</sup> And, expressing a basic tenet of the satisfaction model, “Whoever sins should give

<sup>2</sup> John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Bossy calls it a myth; *Christianity in the West*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem* (SAO 3:79): “‘Quae’ namque tibi ‘utilitas in sanguine meo’ (Ps. 29.10), si descendero in aeternam corruptionem?”

something better to God in return for the honour of which he has *deprived* Him.”<sup>5</sup> Yet elsewhere, in his *Cur Deus homo?* Anselm makes a theological correction which gives a telling sense of the discrete levels of rhetoric and strict theology that characterise his discourse. Of course, he reminds us, “Nothing can be added to or subtracted from His honour, considered in itself. For His honour is, in itself, incorruptible and altogether immutable.”<sup>6</sup> In comparison with the theological truth of the unchanged essence of Father and Son in the Trinity, the familial expressions characteristic of Anselm’s satisfaction story are, in a sense, rhetorical devices: “Through the name *father* and the name *son*, an enormous devotion is felt in the hearts of those listening.”<sup>7</sup> Just as God’s revelation of abstract truth at a figurative level does not affect the integrity of Truth *per se* — so long as what is figurative is not taken literally — so Anselm’s narrative of the very human give and take between Father and Son serves to illustrate a greater truth. Bossy argues that in making his satisfaction argument “Anselm claimed not even to be speaking as a Christian theologian, but advancing an interpretation which he thought would be found instinctively persuasive by all men.”<sup>8</sup> It is immediately apparent that in its barefaced form the doctrine of atonement does not live up to Anselm’s status as a philosopher. Richard Southern argues that it is logically flawed.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Bossy, I believe that the doctrine of atonement is genuine theology. Its theology, however, does not reside in the figurative story, which is its form. The literal version of the doctrine is not its substance but its illustration. The spirit has not always accompanied the letter of Anselm’s doctrine of atonement, one might say.

Anselm’s stated aim in the *CDH* is to demonstrate the reason why Christ endured suffering.<sup>10</sup> “What strength can there be in such weakness, what majesty

<sup>5</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:87): “... qui peccat reddat aliquid deo pro honore ablato maius ....”

<sup>6</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo?* (henceforth cited as *CDH*) 1.15 (SAO 2:72): “Dei honori nequit aliquid, quantum ad illum pertinet, addi vel minui. Idem namque ipse sibi est honor incorruptibilis et nullo modo mutabilis.” Translated in Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 3 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1976), 72-73. Following theological convention, Anselm argues that there is a difference between what God is essentially, in Himself, and how He chooses to reveal Himself to humanity. The latter in no way affects the immutability of the former.

<sup>7</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:129): “... per nomen patris et filii immensa quaedam in cordibus audientium ... pietas sentitur”; trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:133.

<sup>8</sup> Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Richard William Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 115, 117.

<sup>10</sup> *CDH* 1.6 (SAO 2:53).

in such humiliation, what worthy of reverence in such contempt?"<sup>11</sup> His partners in dialogue, the Infidel, ask Anselm to explain what kind of constraint an omnipotent God could possibly be under that would demand that He save humanity only through the undignified manner of the crucifixion?

In what captivity, in which prison, or in whose power were you being held from which God could free you only by redeeming you through so much effort and, in the end, through His own blood? ... If you maintain that God, whom you say created all things by His command, was unable solely by His command to do all the things [you have just mentioned], then you contradict yourselves, because you make him powerless. On the other hand, if you say that He was able [to do these things solely by His command] but willed [to do them] only in the above manner, then how can you argue for the wisdom of this one whom you claim willed to suffer so many unbecoming things for no reason at all?<sup>12</sup>

To this Anselm responds: "Because He has done all these things in this way, he has demonstrated how much He loves us."<sup>13</sup> God could have saved us with the wave of a (metaphorical) hand or the blink of a (metaphorical) eye if He had wanted to. But it was more important for Him *to demonstrate His love for humanity* than to save them without love.

Unlike later renditions of the notion of atonement, like those of Thomas Aquinas or of Vonnegut, Anselm links the gift of salvation and the gift of a model for human behaviour inextricably. In the concluding arguments of the *CDH*, in which he describes how the Son passes His reward over to humanity, Anselm associates the reception of merit with imitation, and Christ's gift with His offer of an example.

To whom will the Son more fittingly give the fruit and the recompense of His death than to those for whose salvation ... He became a man and to whom ...

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<sup>11</sup> *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:84): "Quae autem fortitudo in tanta infirmitate? Quae altitudo in tanta humilitate? Quid venerabile in tanto contemptu?" Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 1:137.

<sup>12</sup> *CDH* 1.6 (SAO 2:53, 54): "In qua ... captione, aut in quo carcere aut in cuius potestate tenebamini, unde vos deus non potuit liberare, nisi vos tot laboribus et ad ultimum sanguine suo redimeret? ... Si dicitis quia facere deus haec omnia non potuit solo iussu, quem cuncta creasse iubendo dicitis, repugnatis vobismetipsis, quia impotentem illum facitis. Aut si fatemini quia potuit, sed non voluit nisi hoc modo: quomodo sapientem illum potestis ostendere, quem sine ulla ratione tam indecentia velle pati asseritis?" Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:54, 55.

<sup>13</sup> *CDH* 1.6 (SAO 2:54): "... et quia haec omnia hoc modo fecit, ostendit quantum nos diligeret ...."

by dying, He gave an example of dying-for-the-sake-of-justice? Surely, they would imitate him in vain if they would not share in His merit.<sup>14</sup>

This last sentence could be interpreted as a statement against imitation in favour of merit, but given his previous statement that Christ's gift to man is his "example of dying-for-the-sake-of-justice," surely what Anselm means here is that they imitate Him in vain if they do not participate in the *meritorious imitation* of dying for the sake of justice? Elsewhere in the *CDH*, Anselm again emphasises that Christ's gift was the example He gave to man: "When He died He gave what He was not obliged to ... when He gave this example in such a way, He did something better (and that His doing it was more pleasing to God) than if He had not done it."<sup>15</sup> Christ's example shows humanity how they too can address the justice they owe to God:

Do you not realise that when He endured with patient kindness the injuries, the abuses, the crucifixion among thieves — which were all inflicted upon Him (as I said above) for the sake of the justice which He obediently kept — He gave human beings an example, in order that they would not, on account of any detriments they can experience, turn aside from the justice they owe to God? He would not at all have given this example if, as He was able to do, He had turned aside from the death that was inflicted upon Him for such a reason.<sup>16</sup>

Here it is clear that the reason Christ did not turn away from death — the reason for the God-man, the reason for divine suffering — was to give a particular example to humanity.

Southern argues that the significance of the Incarnation in teaching the example of the life of Jesus, rather than in satisfying claims of the devil or God, is one of the "great new ideas" that distinguishes twelfth-century theology from Anselm's.<sup>17</sup> Others too have interpreted the devotion to Christ's humanity in the

<sup>14</sup> *CDH* 2.19 (SAO 2:130): "Quibus convenientius fructum et retributionem suae mortis attribuet quam illis, propter quos salvandos ... hominem se fecit, et quibus ... moriendo exemplum moriendi propter iustitiam dedit? Frustra quippe imitatores eius erunt, si meriti eius participes non erunt." Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:134.

<sup>15</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:128): "... quando mortuus est, dedit quod non debebat .... quando hoc exemplum taliter dedit, et magis hoc placere deo, quam si non hoc fecisset." Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:131.

<sup>16</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:127): "An non intelligis quia, cum iniurias et contumelias et mortem crucis cum latronibus sibi, sicut supra diximus, propter iustitiam quam oboedienter servabat, illatas benigna patientia sustinuit, exemplum dedit hominibus, quatenus propter nulla incommoda quae sentire possunt, a iustitia quam deo debent declinent, quod minime dedisset, si secundum potentiam suam mortem pro tali causa illatam declinasset?" Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:130.

<sup>17</sup> Southern, *A Portrait*, 96.

twelfth century as a new theological movement away from atonement-resurrection towards an emphasis on the imitation of Christ's humanity.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Anselm's prayers are regarded as having made an important, even a "revolutionary," contribution to the new focus on a suffering and human Christ,<sup>19</sup> his *CDH* is treated as reiterating retrograde notions of satisfaction. But there is a crucial difference between the traditional satisfaction model that associates suffering with a payment to the devil and Anselm's model in which Christ's suffering addresses a wrong done to God.<sup>20</sup> In Anselm's version of satisfaction, Christ's suffering redeems humanity before God. The very notion that suffering is the means of human redemption to Divinity, the means of human restoration, places a new, powerful emphasis on suffering as the human means of address or approach to God and godliness. The basic shift of Anselm's *CDH* in making Christ's suffering a gift to God, rather than something owed to the devil, means that suffering has some form of currency before God.

In Anselm's *CDH*, suffering, which was regarded by medieval theologians as the most quintessential of all human characteristics, becomes integrally valuable to the divinisation process — or to, as Anselm would put it in Pauline terms, the process of "making justification to God." This in itself places Anselm squarely within the new tradition of valuing Christ's humanity. His *CDH* is designed to show that, far from being something associated with a devilish curse, human suffering is the means of demonstrating love. Thus Anselm's revolutionary evocation of the imagery of the suffering Christ in his prayers is

<sup>18</sup> Describing the shift of emphasis as "crucial," Gillian Evans explains that whilst Peter Abelard responds to the question of why God became man: "To set an example of the living of a perfect human life." Anselm "does not speak of this aspect of the work of Christ in the *Cur Deus homo?* He certainly did not see it as constituting the principal reason for the Incarnation"; *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 162. See also Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Southern famously described Anselm's prayers as "revolutionary"; *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 42; in his later work he describes it as "the Anselmian transformation"; idem, *A Portrait*, 99-112; see also: Benedicta Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 35-39; idem, *Anselm of Canterbury: A Monastic Scholar* (Fairacres, Oxford: S. L. G., 1977). On qualifications of this view see below p. 65 n. 24.

<sup>20</sup> For the argument that Christ's death triumphs over the power of the devil and its refutation see *CDH* 1.6-7; 2.19 (SAO 2:53-59; 2:129-31). Anselm's argument against a dualist division of power between God and the devil derives directly from Augustine. The Infidel in the *CDH*, who object to the idea that God is responsible for suffering, are directly quoting objections Augustine puts into the mouth of the Manichees; on the latter, see Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 113.

entirely compatible with the central redemptive role that Christ's suffering plays in his *CDH*.

Yet the sticking point of interpreting the *CDH* as a philosophy in which Christ functions as a moral exemplar for a new spirituality remains the issue of His well-connectedness. The difficulty in interpreting Anselm's *CDH* as offering a model of imitation is that the doctrine of atonement emphasises the singularity of the redemption that comes only through Christ.<sup>21</sup> Christ is seemingly not just one of us. Sinless, he is without debt and thus free to offer something to God that was not already owed. The payment the Son makes to the Father was owed by humanity. It could therefore only be paid by a human being — this is why God had to be a man. "This debt was so great that only God was able to pay it, although only man ought to pay it."<sup>22</sup> But it is also a payment no ordinary person could make, because humanity exists in a condition of perpetual debt to God and has nothing to give that is not already owed. Only a man free of debt could give something that was not already owed. Christ is exempt from debt because he was "taken sinless from the sinful mass."<sup>23</sup> His sinlessness is what makes Christ so special. It is indeed difficult to view this as a "demonstration of love."

Unlike the imagery of Christ in Majesty, the dominant image of Christ in Anselm's prayers is of the bleeding body draped across a crucifix that was soon to become ubiquitous throughout medieval Europe.<sup>24</sup> If there is a guide to

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Southern, *A Portrait*, 211.

<sup>22</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:126-127): "Quod debitum tantum erat, ut illud solvere, cum non deberet nisi homo, non posset nisi deus ...." Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:130.

<sup>23</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:127): "... sine peccato de massa peccatrice assumi ...."

<sup>24</sup> On the dominance of the Christ in Majesty theme: in the early Middle Ages see Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157-64, with references to further literature; in Carolingian theology see Celia Chazelle, *The Cross, the Image and the Passion in Carolingian Thought and Art* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985). Although Constable and Chazelle both argue that the general prominence of Christ in Majesty in this period is undeniable, both caution that there are exceptions which should qualify the tendency to distinguish earlier from later representations too sharply; Constable, *Three Studies*, 165; Chazelle, *The Cross*, 3. Bynum also warns that some qualification of the view that the humanity of Christ was excluded from devotions before the twelfth century is required; *Jesus as Mother*, 134. Christopher Chase argues that the evocation of Christ's suffering in medieval liturgy predated Anselm, and that what changed in the twelfth century was the frequency of the penitential theme, Christopher L. Chase, "'Christ III,' 'The Dream of the Rood' and Early Christian Passion Piety," *Viator* 11 (1980): 33. On the arrival of the image of Christus patiens in Western Europe and its inheritance from Byzantine icons, see: Erwin Panofsky, "'Imago Pietatis': Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrix'" in *Festschrift für Max Friedländer zum 60 Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Von E. A. Seemann, 1927); Hans Beltig, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark

answering the crucial question of how Christ's redemptive suffering could be imitated, it may be found in the unrelenting effort Anselm makes in his prayers to arouse the supplicant to sympathetic imaginary participation in Christ's crucifixion, a participation expressed in penitential tears. My reading will treat the prayers and the *CDH* as complementary, each contributing equally to Anselm's creation of a new spiritual practice in which suffering and freedom coincide. Thus, I view both Anselm's devotional innovations and his doctrine of atonement as contributing to the twelfth-century focus on salvation through Christ's humanity, particularly through the love and mercy demonstrated in his suffering.

### *The Free Gift*

The reason Anselm gives at the outset of the *CDH* for the necessity of a God-man is that man cannot pay what he owes to God. Anselm asks his fellow monk Boso: "What will you pay to God in proportion to your sin?"<sup>25</sup> Replying with the essence of the Benedictine Rule, Boso says, "Penitence, a contrite and humbled heart, fasting and a variety of physical toil, the mercy of giving and forgiving, as well as obedience."<sup>26</sup> But Anselm pesters further, slightly changing his terms from "paying" to "giving": "In all of these cases what are you *giving* to God?"<sup>27</sup> And again Boso provides a good Benedictine response:

Do I not honour God when out of fear of Him and love for Him I, in contrition of heart, cast aside temporal merriment, when in fasting and toil I tread underfoot the pleasures and repose of this life, when in giving and forgiving I generously bestow my own things, and when in obedience I subject myself to him?<sup>28</sup>

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Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990); Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On the importance of Anselm's introduction of the iconic grieving Mary into Western medieval spiritual devotions, see Sticco, *Planctus Mariae*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> *CDH* 1.20 (SAO 2:86-87): "Dic ergo: quid solves deo pro peccato tuo?"

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, "Paenitentiam, cor contritum et humiliatum, abstinentias et multimodos labores corporis, et misericordiam dandi et dimittendi, et oboedientiam."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, "Quid in omnibus his das deo?"

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, "An non honoro deum, quando propter timorem eius et amorem in cordis contritione laetitiam temporalem abicio, in abstinentiis et laboribus delectationes et quietem huius vitae calco, in dando et dimittendo quae mea sunt largior, in oboedientia me ipsum illi subicio?"

Anselm retaliates with a core point of his *CDH* argument: "When you render something which you would owe to God even if you had not sinned, you ought not to reckon it as payment of the debt which you owe for your sin."<sup>29</sup>

Rendering something to God when it is already owed is not payment for sin. Anselm argues that something *more* is needed and Boso despairs of it: "If God is guided by the principle of justice, then there is no way for this miserable, insignificant man to escape; and the mercy of God seems to vanish."<sup>30</sup> It is passages like this one that reinforce Southern's opinion that Anselm's doctrine of atonement promotes God and diminishes man. "With fierce intensity, [Anselm] magnified the debt in order to glorify God. If, in so doing, he diminished man, that was a conclusion from which he did not shrink: his aim was to magnify God, not man."<sup>31</sup> Christ becomes indispensable because there is no human solution to the problem of debt; human efforts surrender to cosmic drama.

But Anselm's denial of human capacity to make sufficient payment to God is not just a myth involving cosmic scales of justice and legends of the fall. It is also a moral argument critiquing the kind of giving that is offered only because it is owed. God wants something more from humanity than people simply giving because they are required to give. "A gift unless it is wholly unearned, is not a gift at all," Augustine teaches.<sup>32</sup> "What are you giving to God?" Anselm asks, and if he does not have Augustine's reflections in mind, then he may be thinking of Paul's definition of the free gift, which is a crucial text for Anselm's doctrine of atonement:

Rom. 5.15-16: But the free gift is not like the trespass .... the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., "Cum reddis aliquid quod debes deo, etiam si non peccasti, non debes hoc computare pro debito quod debes pro peccato."

<sup>30</sup> *CDH* 1.24 (SAO 2:94): "Si rationem sequitur deus iustitiae, non est qua evadat miser homuncio, et misericordia dei perire videtur." Translations of these passages are mine and Hopkins and Richardson 3:86-87, 95. Cf., Bernard of Clairvaux, *De diligendo Deo* (henceforth cited as *De dil.*) 15.40 (SBO 3:154): "Denique quomodo misericordiae recordabitur, ubi memorabitur iustitiae Dei solius?"

<sup>31</sup> Southern, *A Portrait*, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion* 28.107 (CCSL 46:107): "Gratia uero nisi gratis est gratia non est."

<sup>33</sup> Rom. 5.15-16: "Sed non sicut delictum, ita et donum .... Et non sicut per unum peccatum, ita et donum; nam iudicium quidem ex uno in condemnationem, gratia autem ex multis delictis in justificationem."

In contrast to the monk who subjects himself to Christ out of obedience, in his "Meditation on Human Redemption," Anselm emphasises the peculiarly *voluntary* nature of Christ's salvatory act. "In that man, human nature did not suffer anything out of necessity but suffered with a free will."<sup>34</sup> "Not suffering out of necessity" expresses a similar moral freedom as "not giving because you *have to*." Anselm adds that: "The Father could not force him, for it was something that He had no right to exact from him."<sup>35</sup> "Thus, in that man human nature freely and out of no obligation gave to God something its own."<sup>36</sup>

Behind the figurative story of the Son's payment of human debt to the Father is a strong moral narrative in which Christ's crucifixion represents a truly free act. Deeply informed by Romans, Anselm's doctrine of atonement is concerned with the Pauline moral problem of how it is possible for man to exercise moral liberty when he lives under the law.

The very presence of law deprives man of the power to demonstrate his moral character. He cannot show his innate ability to independently choose goodness. This ability, which Anselm describes as "the power to act justly," defines true freedom.<sup>37</sup> Anselm shares Paul's view that freedom is demonstrated in man's capacity to be good rather than merely obedient. Under the law, choosing between right and wrong is not a spontaneous or voluntary act. There is no means of demonstrating the freedom of choosing goodness. Being under the law creates a situation where we are *impelled* to be good, rather than voluntarily *choosing* to be good.

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Paul, Christ's crucifixion demonstrates the enactment of voluntary goodness even under the conditions of law. Christ faced exactly the same moral predicament as all other men. Yet, rather than fearing punishment and being good out of obedience, his act of goodness

<sup>34</sup> *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:87-88): "... humana natura in illo homine passa est aliquid ulla necessitate, sed sola libera voluntate."

<sup>35</sup> *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:88): "Non enim eum ad hoc pater potuit cogere, quod ab eo exigere non debuit ...." Trans. Ward, 234. Ibid.: "Non enim illi homini pater ut moreretur cogendo praecepit, sed ille quod patri placitum et hominibus profuturum intellexit, hoc sponte fecit."

<sup>36</sup> *Meditatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:87): "Dedit itaque humana natura deo in illo homine sponte et non ex debito quod suum erat ...."

<sup>37</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *De libertate arbitrii* 3 (SAO 1:212): "Illa libertas arbitrii est potestas servandi rectitudinem voluntatis propter ipsam rectitudinem"; cited in Southern, *A Portrait*, 104.

was unmotivated by fear. It was therefore not merely an act of slavish obedience. Indeed, Christ's goodness involved taking on the greatest punishment of all: death. Since Christ's voluntary assumption of punishment demonstrated that he was unmotivated by fear, it can be viewed as an act that was good without being obediently so. It was at once in accordance with the law and free. It involved taking on a punishment without being involuntarily condemned to punishment. Christ turned the punishment of death into an opportunity for liberation. In doing so, he offered a model of how freedom can be achieved even within the condition of life under the law.

Anselm's doctrine of atonement expresses the Pauline model of freedom through voluntary punishment. Christ suffered with a free will, Anselm writes, not out of necessity. He gave when he was under no obligation to, when he was in no way forced to. Anselm views both the imperfections of suffering and giving (he thinks of the latter as literally "suffering a loss to oneself to give to another") as punishments that can be made into opportunities for liberation only if, as Christ chose death, they are voluntarily chosen.

For Bossy, Anselm's doctrine of atonement conforms to underlying medieval cultural assumptions about the nature of social obligations.<sup>38</sup> However, the significance of Christ's offering is that it *transcends* the ordinary bounds of obligatory exchange. The economist's son<sup>39</sup> created a doctrine that critiques the terms of satisfaction characteristic of feudal society, rather than merely reflecting them.

Anselm's spiritual aspiration is a *free offering of suffering* which is a defiance of the nature of condemnatory punishment. This is what Christ represents: "In that man human nature did not suffer anything out of necessity but suffered only voluntarily."<sup>40</sup> Such an idea breaks the rule of law entirely. Christ is Anselm's model of human liberation. He is a man who suffers freely, giving

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105. See also Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 143-52.

<sup>38</sup> Bossy describes the satisfaction aspect of Anselm's doctrine of atonement as "concealing axioms which operated in the West from Anselm's day to Luther's"; *Christianity in the West*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, ed. Richard William Southern (Oxford, 1972), 44-45; cited in Benedicte Ward, "The Life and Times of St. Anselm of Canterbury," introduction to *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Walter Fröhlich (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 5, 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Mediatio redemptionis humanae* (SAO 3:87-88): "... humana natura in illo homine passa est aliquid ulla necessitate, sed sola libera voluntate." See also *CDH* 2.18 (SAO, 2:128).

without compulsion, and thus *suffers* but is not *condemned to punishment*. If human beings could suffer freely, it would be a defiance. It would be an act that takes us, in some way (we might say *spiritually*), beyond the rule of law.

Is there any way for humanity to suffer voluntarily, to truly give? If human beings are *sinful* then, Anselm believes, suffering is deserved as their just punishment. If the universe is ordered by good and just principles, as Anselm hopes it is, then the fact of the existence of suffering must be ordained as some form of just punishment.<sup>41</sup> Suffering would no longer be just and deserved punishment only if human beings were capable of demonstrating a goodness that makes punishment unwarranted. Thus, the question of whether human beings are capable of suffering voluntarily is a question of whether they can be viewed as *sinless* in any way. If human beings were innocent their suffering would not be justly owed as punishment. The sticking point of the moral discourse of the *CDH* coincides with the sticking point of the figurative discourse. Only a man free of sin can offer suffering that is undeserved, or take a loss (give) in a way that is not merely paying back what he already owes. Only Christ can truly give, because only Christ is free of sin and does not therefore deserve his losses as his punishment.

Reading the satisfaction narrative as an expression of moral philosophy, and thinking back on those passages in which Anselm describes the crucifixion as a demonstration of love that I pointed out earlier, it is hard to imagine that Anselm created such a *moral* doctrine without offering any possibility of its replication amongst humanity. The model of freedom through suffering seems designed to meet peculiarly human circumstances. But the singularity of Christ's *sinless* suffering is a vital stumbling block to human imitation. The soteriological question becomes: How does humanity regain or make up for that *one* quality that distinguishes them from Christ and prevents them from participating fully in his "dying-for-the-sake-of-justice"? How can they demonstrate the true goodness that is required to make their suffering no longer a punishment?

In his "sequel" to the *CDH*, *On the Conception of the Virgin and Original Sin*, Anselm backs up his *CDH* theory of the necessity of Christ's atonement

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<sup>41</sup> *CDH* 1.12 (SAO 2:69).

because, he says, “Human nature is unable by itself to recover justice.”<sup>42</sup> The most obvious implication of this statement would seem to be that humanity is dependent on the merit earned by Christ’s atonement. But it does not necessarily mean this. Instead, if we emphasise the “*per se*” — “human nature is unable *by itself* to recover justice” — we could read this statement as reflecting the Augustinian tradition to which Anselm felt self-evidently indebted.<sup>43</sup> Like this passage from *On the Conception of the Virgin*, Anselm also argues in the *CDH* that human nature does not have the wherewithal to give back to God what they owe him in justice. “If God is guided by a principle of justice then there seems to be no hope for man,” Boso laments as an entrée to “why a God-man.”<sup>44</sup> In this dialogue, Anselm rebukes Boso for believing that acts that a monk would typically perform out of duty (fasting toiling, and so on) would suffice to earn him God’s forgiveness. This kind of suffering, or giving, because it is “already owed,” does not demonstrate love or recover justice.

If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11.6).

Human nature is unable by itself to recover justice (*De conceptu*).

The human enactment of voluntary goodness is *not* through the independence of trying to recover justice by themselves. The ascetic way of working towards self-perfection — of being obedient to prove that you are good; of overcoming and mastering suffering to replicate a divine state of impassibility — is not the way to the freedom revealed in the crucifixion. Obedient payment is not true giving. Goodness does not reside in the human soul, but rests exclusively in “God.” In Augustinian tradition, divinisation does not come from imitating God’s divinely impassible state, or from an ascetic practice geared towards this. This path is critiqued as “obedient” because it does not reflect the true freedom achieved by Christ. Instead of following a path in which goodness is attained by its replication in obedient behaviour, human beings must recover a goodness that

<sup>42</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* (henceforth cited as *De conceptu*) 8 (SAO 2:150): “... humana natura sola per se iustitiam recuperare nequit ....” Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:154.

<sup>43</sup> Anselm calls himself “Augustinus minor,” quoted in Ward, *A Monastic Scholar*, 18. On Augustine’s influence on Anselm see Southern, *A Portrait*, 17, 31-32.

<sup>44</sup> *CDH* 1.24 (SAO 2:94); see above p. 67 n. 30.

is outside of themselves. They must come to the nadir of their condition of punishment to realise true freedom. If human beings could suffer in a way that recovers the goodness that is beyond them, they would “die-for-the-sake-of-justice.”

*A Shadow of Innocence*

Didn't know you'd come to save us Lord,  
To take our sins away.  
Our eyes was blind we couldn't see  
We didn't know who you was.

The world treat you mean, Lord,  
Treat me mean too.  
But that's how things is down here  
We don't know who you is.

.....

Just seems like we can't do right  
Look how we treated you!  
But Please Sir, forgive us, Lord  
We didn't know 'twas you.

*Sweet Little Jesus Boy*, traditional African-American spiritual

The feelings of indignant and righteous suffering (“The world treat you mean, Lord, Treat me mean too”) conveyed in this African-American spiritual express much of the enduring popular feeling around the crucifixion story. According to Christopher Chase’s research, the depiction of a bleeding cross in Anglo-Saxon liturgy expresses a traditional Christian judgment narrative that has liturgical origins as far back as the second-century Good Friday services of the Church of Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> Guilt over the “terrible death” of one “too good for this world” is an enduring and poignant Gospel theme. In ninth- and tenth-century Anglo-Saxon liturgy, the cross speaks to the congregation blaming sinners for Christ’s terrible

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<sup>45</sup> Chase, “Christ III,” 27.

death, invoking their guilt and, at the same time, making a plea for their sympathy. It implores: "See, all you people, if there is any suffering like my suffering."<sup>46</sup> Guilt over Christ's death was also a common theme amongst the Fathers, as Chase points out. When "we celebrate the Passion of the Lord," Augustine preaches:

It is a time of moaning, a time of groaning, a time of confession and prayer. And who of us has tears enough for such grief? ... Even if there were a fountain of tears in our eyes it would not suffice ... The Lord was flogged, and no one came to help; defiled with spit, and no one came; cut with whips, and no one came; crowned with thorns, and no one came; raised on the cross, and no one came to the rescue; he cried, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" and no help arrived. Why brethren why?<sup>47</sup>

Because "We didn't know 'twas you" is the defensive refrain of "Sweet Little Jesus Boy."

In the figurative form of Anselm's doctrine of atonement, Christ is the special guy who is so well connected that, of all humanity, he is the only one who is punished wrongly and deserves to be saved. "We didn't know 'twas you" could mean, in the words of Kurt Vonnegut, that we didn't know Jesus was so well connected as the Son of God, or it could mean, "We didn't know that he was one of us." "The world treat you mean, Lord, Treat me mean too." Indeed, he was my very self. We are responsible for killing Christ. We know that as surely as we know that we are responsible for taking away our own goodness, because Christ represents our goodness. But when we sinned, we didn't know that we had sinned, "Our eyes was blind we couldn't see, We didn't know who you was." In other words, we failed to realise that we had the capacity for goodness at the time when we committed sin. We only became aware of our goodness after we had sinned, when we realised that we had done something wrong. Goodness is attested by remorse. This is as close as we can come to goodness "that's how things is down here", not to be good, but to know what the demise of innocence is through the recognition of its loss in a guilty conscience. Since guilt is a tribute to our goodness — indeed, it is the best and only tribute we can offer — it is out of respect of our guilt that we feel the strength to ask forgiveness. "Please Sir, forgive us, Lord" — we now see. The liturgical ritual succeeds emotively because

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<sup>46</sup> *Adoratio crucis*, cited in Chase, "Christ III," 29.

the audience relates to Christ's innocence. "Self-pity infects," Plato observed of tragic drama.<sup>48</sup> The butchering of innocence is regretted and mourned by the audience because they interpret that innocence as a part of themselves — a "paradise lost."

Like a good deal of traditional Christian liturgy (both past and present), the dominant feature of Anselm's prayers is that they create a feeling of guilt in the person praying. Thus Anselm's "Prayer to Christ" describes the crucifixion in a conventionally accusatorial tone:

Why, oh my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow when you could not bear the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?

Why could you not bear to see the nails violate the hands and feet of your creator? Why did you not see with horror the blood that poured out of the side of your redeemer?

Why were you not drunk with bitter tears when they gave him bitter gall to drink?

Why did you not share the sufferings of the most pure virgin, his worthy mother, your most beneficent lady?

My most merciful lady,

What can I say about the fountains that flowed from your most pure eyes when you saw your only son before you bound, beaten and hurt?

What do I know of the flood that drenched your matchless face when you beheld your son, your God and your Lord stretched on the cross without guilt when the flesh of your flesh was cruelly butchered by wicked men?

How can I judge what sobs troubled your most pure breast when you heard, "Woman behold your son"? (Joan. 19.27)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 21.2.1 (PL 36:171, 174); quoted in Chase, "'Christ III,'" 23.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Republic* 606b.

<sup>49</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervere* (Oratio 2) (SAO 3:7-8): Cur, o anima mea, te praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi, cum ferre non posses vulnerari lancea latus tui salvatoris?

Cum videre nequires violari clavis manus et pedes tui plasmatoris?

Cum horreres effundi sanguinem tui redemptoris?

Cur non es inebriata lacrimarum amaritudine, cum ille potaretur amaritudine fellis?

Cur non es compassa castissimae virgini, dignissimae matri eius, benignissimae dominae tuae?

Domina mea misericordissima, quos fontes dicam erupisse de pudicissimis oculis, cum attenderes unicum filium tuum innocentem coram te ligari, flagellari, mactari?

Quos fluctus credam perfudisse piissimum vultum, cum suspiceres eundem filium et deum et dominum tuum in cruce sine culpa extendi et carnem de carne tua ab impiis crudeliter dissecari?

Quibus singultibus aestimabo purissimum pectus vexatum esse, cum tu audires: "mulier, ecce filius tuus?" (Joan. 19.27) Trans. mine and Ward, 95-96.

Let fountains of the purest tears wash away the sight of this suffering! The woman in meditation, reading Anselm's prayers, identifies strongly with Mary, but unlike that most pure of women, she knows that she is not innocent.<sup>50</sup> The survivor-guilt is exacerbated in the poignantly repetitious lines: "Why were you not *there* ... You who could not even bear to look!" And, most accusatorially of all: "You who did not cry!" The horror of the crime before her eyes is presented to the woman in mediation as if she were its perpetrator. Not crying over these *innocent* victims is akin to not caring about them, which is akin to having killed them. There is the suggestion that if you had cared — if you had *been* there — it might have made a difference. As Chase argues, in the Christian judgment narrative, "those who put Christ to death *or fail to aid him* in his distress are already condemned by their acts" (my emphasis).<sup>51</sup> Identifying with Mary, Christ's mother and wife ("your Son ... and your Lord"), the woman in prayer imagines that she is responsible for the death of her son and lover.

Further identifying Christ as innocence itself, she weeps for her own butchered innocence. Hers was a virgin soul:

Once ... washed with the whiteness of heaven, given the Holy Spirit ....  
 You have abandoned your chaste lover in heaven and gone after your hateful  
 corrupter in hell,  
 And in the lower world you have prepared for yourself not a marriage  
 chamber but a brothel.<sup>52</sup>

No one may consider themselves exempt from sin:

Perhaps you think of some sin as small?...  
 But, alas for me, surely all sin dishonours God because it disobeys his laws?  
 Where is the sinner who dares to call any sin small?  
 To dishonour God: how small a thing is that?<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> I have imagined a woman in meditation because Anselm sent his prayers (in 1081) to Adelaide, daughter of William the Conqueror, and to the Empress Mathilda of Tuscany (in 1104), see Ward, *Prayers*, 275-76. The supplicant depicted in the illustrations of Anselm's book of prayers for Mathilda is female and Otto Pächt argues that the pictures were possibly drawn under the direct instruction of Anselm himself; "The Illustrations of St. Anselm's Prayers and Meditations" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956): 68-83.

<sup>51</sup> Chase, "Christ III," 18.

<sup>52</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Deploratio virginitatis male amissae* (SAO 3:80, 81): "Tu, inquam, quae quondam candidata caelesti lavacro, dotata spiritu sancto ....  
 In caelo dereliquisti castum amatorem tuum, et in infernum secuta es odiosum corruptorem tuum.  
 Et in baratro parasti non thalamum, sed prostibulum tuum." Trans. Ward, 225, 226.

<sup>53</sup> *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem* (SAO 3:77-78): "Forsan parvum quid putas aliquod peccatum

Just as her sin destroyed her own lost innocence, so, if she identifies Christ as the innocent part of herself, she has killed Christ. Wanting to be like Mary or Christ only provokes the sense of oneself as a doppelganger — a “God-man.”

The only thing she can do is to cry in guilt, to suffer *with* the innocence that she has destroyed, as if to cry out: “Take me instead!” This is what monastic teaching calls “the first kind” of compunction — the recognition of guilt, *compunctio timoris* — and there is more to this cycle.<sup>54</sup> If she feels that she is forgiven, by somehow suffering enough, the relief she feels is enormous and, ecstatic, she cries again. She has become purified through the first compunction and now, in her purity, she wants to come to know Christ but she is reduced again to depression because Christ is far away; the distance is unbearable.

Who will tell me of my beloved? “For I am sick from love” (Cant. 2.5).

“The joy of my heart fails me”; my laughter “is turned to mourning” (Thren. 5.15);

“My heart and my flesh fail me but God is the strength of my heart my portion forever” (Ps. 72.26).

“My soul refuses comfort” (Ps. 76.3) unless from you my dear.

“Whom have I in heaven but you and what do I desire upon earth beside you?” (Ps. 72.25)

I want you, I hope for you, I seek you.

“To you my heart has said, ‘Seek my face.’

Your face Lord, have I sought; turn not your face from me!” (Ps. 26.8)<sup>55</sup>

She has already endured self-hatred and now she must go through a hatred of life. She cries again out of hatred for the life that separates her from ultimate union

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Sed heu me, nonne omne peccatum per praevaricationem deum exhonorat?

Quod ergo peccatum audebit peccator dicere parvum?

Deum enim exhonorare quando est parvum?” Trans. Ward, 221-223.

*De conceptu* 7, 8 (SAO 2:149): “... quoniam in semine trahunt peccandi, cum homines iam erunt, necessitatem ... humana natura nascitur in infantibus ... cum debito satisfaciendi pro peccato Adae ...”; trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:154.

<sup>54</sup> On these two forms of compunction (*timoris* and *amoris*) in Benedictine tradition see Leclercq, *L’amour des lettres*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, “Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervere” (Oratio 2) (SAC 3:9): “Quis nuntiabit dilecto ‘quia amore languet?’” (Cant. 2.5)

‘Defecit gaudium cordis’ mei, ‘versus est in luctum’ risus meus (cf., Thren. 5.15).

‘Defecit caro mea et cor meum, deus cordis mei et pars mea deus in aeternum’ (Ps.72.26).

‘Renuit consolari anima mea’ (Ps. 76.3) nisi de te, dulcedo mea.

‘Quid enim mihi est in caelo, et a te quid volui super terram?’ (Ps. 72.25)

Te volo, te spero, te quaero.

‘Tibi dixit cor meum: Quaesivi vultum tuum,

vultum tuum, domine, requiram; ne avertas faciem tuam a me!’” (Ps. 26.8) Trans. Ward, 97-98.

with innocence. But still, again and again, she is plagued by that initial guilt, because the more she identifies with innocence the more she realises her guilt. She is returned to those first hours and the crucifixion scene, from which she never strays far.

The hope that she is innocent is tortuous. The more that hope grows, the more guilt she feels for even thinking it. Human innocence amounts to a recognition of what we do not have. The only thing that shows that we are anything like Christ is, paradoxically, a recognition of how unlike him we are. Christ's innocent suffering is replicated in human beings only in the shadow of innocence implied by our capacity to recognise our guilt.

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Because righteousness is in God whose nature is inaccessible to human perception, but unrighteousness is at home in us humans or even in every rational creature, from this unrighteousness of ours which is known to us that righteousness of God that is inaccessible to us and incomprehensible is known and recommended and springs, so to speak, as a contrary from its contrary. "Through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law" (Rom. 3.20-21).

Origen

We cannot offer voluntary suffering since we have always already sinned and deserve our punishment. Yet through an imitation of Christ involving guilt, this is what we strive towards. There is a difference between, on the one hand, "taking punishment" out of fear and, on the other hand, feeling guilty and embracing punishment. The recognition of wrongdoing provoked through identification with the goodness in another is a spontaneous internal judgement that is a token of our innocence and of our capacity to be beyond law. The mythical version of freedom in Anselm's doctrine of atonement is that Christ was entirely innocent and suffered in spite of it in reward for which he won salvation. Suffering with an awareness of guilt is as close as we can come to an imitation of Christ.

Christ's innocence is straightforward for Anselm — he can say simply that Christ “would be taken sinless from the sinful mass” and “the son of the Virgin is not subject to Adam's sin or debt.”<sup>56</sup> However, the original sinlessness of the Virgin is a more difficult case to argue. The Virgin “belonged to the class of those who through him were *cleansed* from their sins before His birth.”<sup>57</sup> “The Virgin ... was conceived in iniquities ... this Virgin was born with original sin.”<sup>58</sup> Yet, in a remarkable speculation, Anselm describes how the Virgin Mary was cleansed of all sin because of her faith.<sup>59</sup> The Virgin is not only the model of innocence with whom the woman in prayer most strongly identifies, she is also a woman who has experienced a constitution-changing transformation through the fervency of her faith.

The modern theologian Søren Kierkegaard expresses the essence of the guilt theme that dominates Anselm's prayers. He writes, “If a man in relation to God always suffers as being guilty, then at every moment, whatever happens, he is assured that God is love.” And, “If it is an edifying thought that a son is always in the wrong as against his father; oh, then it is also a blessing that it is impossible to doubt that God is love.”<sup>60</sup> If you have even one little sin then you are sinful, Anselm teaches. Yet, Anselm's prayers suggest a method within which recognition of guilt attests to human innocence. If you have sin without feeling guilt, then there is no innocence in you. But if sin evokes guilt then there is an indirect testament to human innocence and to the human capacity to be beyond the law, to be free. In Christ is manifest what in us can only be potential. He is a model embodying the reality of the innocence that remains only as a shadow in his brothers. Through guilt we recognise the goodness that we do not have.

This is a model for freedom within the condition of suffering; freedom even whilst under the law. Freedom on earth is to deprive suffering of its aspect

<sup>56</sup> *CDH* 2.18 (SAO 2:127): “... sine peccato de massa peccatrice assumi ....” Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:130. *De conceptu* 12 (SAO 2:154): “... filius virginis non subiaceat peccato aut debito Adae.” *De conceptu* 8 (SAO 2:149): “... in eo quod filius dei in personam suam assumpsit de virgine, nulla potuit esse peccati macula.”

<sup>57</sup> *CDH* 2.16 (SAO 2:119): “Virgo ... fuit de illis qui ante nativitatem eius per eum mundati sunt a peccatis ....” Trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:121.

<sup>58</sup> *CDH* 2.16 (SAO 2:116): “Virgo ... ipsa ... ‘in iniquitatibus’ concepta est, ‘et in peccatis concepit’ eam ...”(cf., Ps. 50.7; Rom. 5.12); trans. Hopkins and Richardson 3:119.

<sup>59</sup> *De conceptu* 19 (SAO 2:160): “... etiam si in tota virginis essentia peccatum esset ... per fidem munda fieri posset.” *De conceptu* 18 (SAO 2:159): “... virgo ... per fidem mundata sit.”

as punishment by suffering voluntarily. Christ can do this because of his innocence. We could only suffer freely, and thus in our freedom from law become God and not man, if we were innocent. If we were innocent our suffering could no longer be construed as a just punishment or as something which we owe to justice. It would therefore be a truly free offering. The opportunity for human imitation of Christ is narrow. It is the slender shadow of innocence cast by our recognition of guilt. Yet, however slight, its existence creates the possibility of human redemption — the chance to become, following Christ, human beings capable of giving freely.

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<sup>60</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Gospel of Suffering*, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948), 71, 78.

*“Fear the Eyes of the Gazelle”: Compassionate  
Love in Bernard of Clairvaux*

Turn away your eyes from me, for they disturb me!

The Song of Songs

The over-riding issue in Bernard of Clairvaux’s spiritual writing is the question of how the spiritual perfection of love can be experienced by human beings. Etienne Gilson describes the problem of how ordinary carnal love becomes perfect love of God as “singularly important” to Bernard.<sup>1</sup> The ascensionist method of shaping carnal into divine love described by traditional teachers like Origen, Evagrius and John Cassian is through a process of gradual training in which the soul progresses in purification until, having left behind earthly attachments, it is free to receive the spiritual embrace of the Eternal Word. Various attributing it to the influence of Origen, Gregory the Great, Benedict, or monastic spiritual tradition generally, a number of scholars have emphasised the importance of an ordered progression upwards, from the flesh to the spirit, as the basis of Bernard’s teaching on the transformation of love. Following Gilson’s initiation, Michael Casey’s recent study of Bernard’s mysticism attempts to redress the “widespread misconceptions” that Bernard’s spirituality is entirely focused on the Incarnation and Christ’s humanity.<sup>2</sup> Like Casey, Bernard McGinn emphasises the importance of spiritual hierarchy in Bernard’s teaching. The lessons of Christ’s humility and charity are part of Bernard’s spiritual program, McGinn argues, but, in the end, they are “secondary to the essential pattern by which we, like our Head, pass from

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<sup>1</sup> Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 203-208, 238-41; Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 19, 79-80.

the carnal to the spiritual level.”<sup>3</sup> Casey interprets the necessary departure from the carnal level as the “soul’s transcendence of all that bespeaks limitation, even the humanity of Christ, qua limited, to become majesty of the divinity.”

In “Sermon Three” of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Bernard describes spiritual progression through the metaphor of three types of kisses between bride and bridegroom. The first, the kiss of the feet, is modelled after Mary Magdalene and expresses the spiritual beginning of penitence. The second, the kiss of the hand, represents the intermediate stage of love, not now carnal or inspired by fear but social and charitable. The third is the kiss of the mouth, which Bernard describes in terms that Casey calls the “realm of the properly mystical experience,” words like *excessus*, *stupor* and *raptus*.<sup>5</sup>

And now what remains, O good Lord, except that suffused with the fullness of your light, and while my spirit is fervent, you would graciously bestow on me the kiss of your mouth, and give me unbounded joy in your presence? (Ps. 15.11) O You who are most serene, most delightful, tell me: “Where will you lead your flock to graze, where will you rest at noon?” (Cant. 1.6)<sup>6</sup>

Such rhapsodies are common throughout the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, but then, as the low note to the high, Bernard characteristically renounces his ambition. Describing it as a “familiar theme in my writings,” as “is evident” and “as you well know,” Bernard admits, “I do not ask as the bride did, where he takes his rest at noon” (Cant. 1.6). Returning his focus to the Incarnation he repeats: “I do not ask where he rests at noon for I see him on the cross as my Saviour.”<sup>7</sup> In book one of *On the Trinity*, Augustine writes: “Not that I have already attained or am perfect, if not Paul the apostle, how much less may I,

<sup>3</sup> McGinn, *Presence of God*, 2:177.

<sup>4</sup> Casey, *Thirst for God*, 233; citing Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in festivitatem omnium sanctorum* 4.2 (SBO 5.357).

<sup>5</sup> Casey, *Thirst for God*, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* (henceforth cited as SC) 3.3.6 (SBO 1:17): “Et nunc quid restat, o bone Domine, nisi ut iam in plenitudine lucis, in fervore spiritus, ad oris quoque osculum dignanter admittens, adimpleas me laetitia cum vultu tuo? (Ps. 15. 11) Indica mihi, o suavissime, o serenissime, ‘Indica mihi ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie?’” (Cant. 1.6) Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 4 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 20.

<sup>7</sup> SC 43.3.4 (SBO 2:43), quoted in full below p. 83 n. 17.

prostrate far below his feet, count myself to have apprehended?"<sup>8</sup> Similarly comparing himself unfavourably to Paul, Bernard moans:

But what is a miserable man like me doing running around the two upper heavens — and that more with the superfluousness of talk than with vivacity of spirit. I have work enough for hands and feet beneath the lowest heaven!<sup>9</sup>

McGinn describes Bernard's presentation of life as marked by "unbearable tension between what we are meant to be and what we are."<sup>10</sup> Following the tradition "of his masters" Augustine and Paul, "one can hardly read him for more than a few pages without finding a passage, pessimistic and often poignant, on the sinful situation of humanity since the fall."<sup>11</sup>

Bernard's tendency to renounce or renege on his contemplative goals, combined with a reactionary defence of the excellent virtues of humility and an invocation of Christ-crucified, presents a problem for those who view his spirituality as essentially ascensionist. McGinn puts it down to Bernard's being a "good Augustinian" and imbibing the pessimistic culture of monasticism which was steeped in a "profound sense of human sinfulness and the misery of our daily experience."<sup>12</sup> Casey argues that the only thing salutary about Bernard's (undeniably frequent) pessimistic moods is that he returns to an optimistic spiritual pursuit after them with enhanced resolve.<sup>13</sup> For Jean Leclercq, Bernard's characteristic deflation marks a moment in which humanity becomes aware that its relationship to God is based on need.<sup>14</sup>

As Casey has noted, whilst the influence of Augustine on Bernard it is generally acknowledged it has not been explored beyond the obvious.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, I argue that Bernard's Augustinian-style "lack of spiritual confidence" is as integral to Bernard's moral mysticism as it was to Augustine's. Bernard's

<sup>8</sup> *De trin.* 1.5.8 (CCSL 50:37): "Non quia iam acceperim, aut iam perfectus sim (nam si Paulus apostolus, quanto magis ego longe infra illius pedes iacens non me arbitror apprehendisse?)" Trans. Hill, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* (henceforth cited as *De gradibus*) 1.9.24 (SBO 3:35): "Sed quid ego miser, superflua magis loquacitate quam spiritus vivacitate, duos caelos superiores percurro, qui manibus pedibusque repens adhuc sub inferiore laboro?"

<sup>10</sup> McGinn, *Presence of God*, 2:172.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Casey, *Thirst for God*, 54, 61-2, 264.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Leclercq, introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans, (Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1987), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Casey, *Thirst for God*, pp. 28-29 n. 52.

pronounced sense of the difference between what we are meant to be and what we are, as McGinn put it, is not the difference between life on and off the spiritual path. Instead, I interpret the dialectic between Bernard's desire for an end-goal in perfect love and his confession of humility as not so much a renunciation of the goal of being perfected by love as a redirection of it back into humility. Bernard is a tease. If you want this — he is saying through hundreds of instances where his own case is exemplary — then you must seek it another way. I argue that this is because, like the Pauline-based mysticism of Augustine and Anselm and based on the same Pauline philosophy, Bernard's mysticism is fundamentally moral rather than "revelatory." Of course it is the latter too, but it is them as a consequence of its moral accomplishment.<sup>16</sup> Rejecting the place "where the bride rests at noon," Bernard interestingly describes an alternative path through Christ-crucified as his own personal philosophy — "my philosophy":

Hence as you well know, these sentiments are often on my lips and God knows they are always in my heart. They are a familiar theme in my writings, as is evident. This is my philosophy, one more refined and interior, to know Jesus and him crucified (1 Cor. 2.2). I do not ask as the bride did, where he takes his rest at noon (Cant. 1.6), because my joy is to hold him fast where he lies between my breasts. I do not ask where he rests at noon for I see him on the cross as my Saviour. What she desired is the more sublime, what I experience is the more sweet. Her portion was bread that satisfies the hunger of children, mine is the milk (1 Cor. 3.2) that fills the breasts of mothers, therefore I shall keep it between my breasts (Cant. 1.12).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> More than Casey or McGinn, Gilson interprets Bernard's mysticism within the Pauline moral project of the will's liberation. Gilson emphasises the role of reason in the liberatory project of ordering the affections, e.g., *Mystical Theology*, 100; John Sommerfeldt does likewise: *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 183-95. These scholars emphasise Bernard's respect for *ratio* and *intellectus* in order to refute the interpretation that his *via affectus* means that Bernard is some kind of a "romantic" or "anti-rationalist" in the modern sense. I argue that Bernard finds reason "very good" but nonetheless *morally* as well as "mystically" insufficient. Thus, Gilson and Sommerfeldt's assumption that reason orders the lower/beginner spheres encompassed by morality before it takes a backseat to grace in the higher mystical realms is the main area of my disagreement, as we shall see.

<sup>17</sup> SC 43.3.4 (SBO 2:43): "Propterea haec mihi in ore frequenter, sicut vos scitis; haec in corde semper, sicut scit Deus; haec stilo meo admodum familiaria, sicut apparet; haec mea subtilior, interior philosophia, scire Iesum, et hunc crucifixum (1 Cor. 2.2). Non requiro, sicut sponsa, ubi cubet in meridie (Cant. 1.6), quem laetus amplector mea inter ubera commorantem. Non requiro ubi pascat in meridie, quem intueor Salvatorem in cruce. Illud sublimius, istud suavius: panis illud, hoc lac; hoc viscera reficit parvulorum (1 Cor. 3.2), hoc replet ubera matrum: et ideo 'inter ubera mea commorabitur'" (Cant. 1.12). Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 7 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 223.

This is not the mere rhetoric of humility, nor is it the hereditary sin of Augustinian self-doubt. Instead, it is fully supported by Bernard's own interpretation of Pauline freedom as the birth of grace even whilst we are under the law, a freedom that comes from within what we are quintessentially as human beings.

In this chapter, I present an alternative interpretation of what "ordering the affections" means for Bernard, one based on his interpretation of the difference between merit and grace. Ultimately, this will lead us to a different location for discovering the perfection of love than that attained through purification. Treading further theologically than we have hitherto dared, we will see a suggestion that Bernard challenges the idea that there can be any God of love beyond a God who suffers. We will conclude on the most important note of all: the extraordinarily social nature of Bernard's mysticism.

*Redeat homo in hominem!*

In William of St-Thierry's *Life of St. Bernard*, William shows Bernard instructing his friend about the "right" and "wrong" types of tears. The latter express carnal grief, the former spiritual.<sup>18</sup> According to monastic tradition and a ubiquitous opinion amongst the fathers, spiritual grief over the death of the soul is contrasted with grief over physical death. Augustine conventionally asserts:

So often if someone's son dies, then she will weep for him, but if he should sin, she will not weep over him. When she sees him sinning, then she should weep and grieve over him .... then he is indeed a subject for tears.<sup>19</sup>

Gregory Nazianzen calls mourning women "vulgar mothers, who are mothers only in the flesh."<sup>20</sup> When she weeps over her son's sin, Monica behaves as the mother of Augustine's soul, spiritually rebirthing him. As a maternal abbot,

<sup>18</sup> William of St-Thierry, *Vita Prima* fragmenta 2 in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 37.24* (CCSL 38:398): "Et tamen plerumque si filius cuiusquam moriatur, plangit illum; si peccet, non illum plangit. Tunc plangeret, tunc doleret, cum peccantem videret ... tunc erat plangendus." Also cited above p. 46 n. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Orationes* (PG 35:928): "Haec enim ignavis, abjectique animi matribus conveniunt, quae carnis dumtaxat matres sunt ..."; cited in Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 33.

Bernard describes himself weeping more for the death of his spiritual sons than a mother would at the bodily death of her son.<sup>21</sup> William of St-Thierry argues that a human mother — who, unlike all other animals, births her child in excruciating pain and with such trauma to the baby — must be nothing but a wicked stepmother.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to all of this denigration of “mothers *only* in the flesh,” Anselm of Canterbury implores the mother of his soul to “do what the mother of my flesh would do.”<sup>23</sup> Just as Augustine grieved for his mother, Bernard of Clairvaux also subtly returns to the virtues of natural grief as the expression of a more humane spirituality.

As we saw in the *Confessions*, so in Bernard’s thought we find the conventional hierarchy of correct, so-called “spiritual” grief over the state of the soul, and “wrong” grief over the death of the body, expressed and then deliberately revoked. Augustine describes how a wave of grief gathered like a storm in his breast when his mother died. The “violent rule” of his mind wanted to suck back his “necessary tears” (*habenas lacrimis*) “until their fountain was dry.” But eventually he was allowed to weep and his tears flowed out as much as they wanted.<sup>24</sup> Grieving for the death of his brother Gerard, Bernard similarly fails to control his tears.

I have forced myself not to give way to much weeping, though I was much troubled and sorrowful. But I couldn’t control my sadness (*imperare tristitiae*), as I could my tears, as the Bible says, “I was troubled and did not speak” (Ps. 76.5). But the grief that had been suppressed, rooted itself more deeply inside me and it felt as if it had become all the more keen because it was not allowed out. I confess, I am beaten. Let it out, for what I suffer inside needs to come out.<sup>25</sup>

As for Augustine, Bernard’s tears are a comfort:

<sup>21</sup> SC 42.3.5 (SBO 2:36): “Et illa quidem hoc pro morte temporali; quanto magis me pro morte aeterna filii mei manet utique ploratus et ululatus multus ....” Cf., Amos 8.10; Monica weeps over Augustine, in *Conf.* 3.11.19 (CCSL 27:37): “... amplius quam flent matres corporea funera.”

<sup>22</sup> William of St-Thierry, *De natura corporis et animae* 2 (PL 180:715); cf. SC 24.2.6 (SBO 1:157-58).

<sup>23</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, “Oratio ad sanctum Paulum” (Oratio 10) (SAO 3: 41): “Fac, mater animae meae, quod faceret mater carnis meae ....”

<sup>24</sup> *Conf.* 9.12.29 (CCSL 27:150); *Conf.* 9.12.33 (CCSL 27: 206), as cited above p. 36 n. 52.

<sup>25</sup> SC 26.2.3 (SBO 1:171): “... exegi a memetipso non indulgere multo fletui, multum tamen turbatus et maestus. Nec potui imperare tristitiae, qui potui lacrimae, sed, ut scriptum est: ‘Turbatus sum et non sum locutus’ (Ps. 76.5). At suppressus dolor altius introrsum radicavit, eo, ut sentio, acerbior factus, quo non est exire permissus. Fateor, victus sum. Exeat, necesse est, foras quod intus patior.”

Come out, come out, you tears that already desire to come out. Come out for he who had blocked your course has left (Gen. 7.11). Let the cataracts of my wretched head be opened and let fountains of water erupt so strongly that they may suffice to wash away my sordid sins, those sins that have brought Your anger upon me (Job 6.2) ... for those who grieve, will be consoled (Matth. 5.5).<sup>26</sup>

Like Augustine's parody of the Stoics, first comes a rhetorical despoise of "worldly grief" along with the common arguments — that worldly grief deserves itself to be wept over and that grief should not be "out of proportion":

Of course, everyday we see "the dead lamenting their dead" (Matth. 8.22) — they weep much, but bear no fruits. Not that we can blame the emotion, unless it is excessive, but its cause. The former is certainly natural, and the confusion it causes is a part of their punishment for having sinned, but the latter is vanity and sin. Since, unless I am mistaken, it is only the weeping of the damned for the glories of the flesh, of those who have been misfortunate in their present lives. Those who so weep should themselves be wept for.<sup>27</sup>

But, in the very next sentence, Bernard confesses that he shares this purposeless, vain urge to weep, asking, "Can it be possible that I am one of them?" (*Numquid ego sic?*)<sup>28</sup>

I do feel it intensely in spite of myself, because my strength is not the strength of stones nor is my flesh of bronze (Job 6.12). I feel it and go on grieving; my pain is ever with me (Ps. 37.18) .... You say then that this is carnal? That it is human yes, since I am a man. If this does not satisfy you then I do not deny

<sup>26</sup> SC 26.5.8 (SBO 1:176): "Exite, exite lacrimae iam pridem exire cupientes: exite, quia is, qui vobis meatum obstruxerat, comaeavit. Aperiantur cataractae miseri capitis (cf. Mal. 3.10), et erumpant fontes aquarum, si forte sufficiant sordes diluere culparum, quibus iram merui .... Nam qui lugent, ipsi consolabuntur" (Matth. 5.5). Cf., *Conf.* 8.12.28 (CCSL 27:130-31): "Ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi me nescio quomodo et dimisi habenas lacrimis, et proruperunt flumina oculorum meorum ...." *Conf.* 13.13.14 (CCSL 27:249): "... et aperuit cataractas donorum suorum, ut fluminis impetus laetificarent civitatem tuam" (Ps. 45.5).

<sup>27</sup> SC 26.6.8 (SBO 1:176): "Videmus nempe mortuos quotidie plangere mortuos suos (Matth. 8.22): fletum multum, et fructum nullum. Non culpamus affectum, nisi cum excedit modum, sed causam. Ille nimirum naturae est, et eius turbatio poena peccati, haec vanitas et peccatum. Etenim ibi sola, nisi fallor, plorantur damna gloriae carnis, vitae praesentis incommoda. Et plorandi qui ita plorant." Cf. Peter Abelard, *Ethica* "Quid proprie dicatur penitentia" in *Ethica* ed. and trans. D. E. Luscombe, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 78: "Quam plurimos quippe cottidie cernimus morientes graviter ingemiscere ...." And again, "Multos quippe cottidie de hac vita recessuros de flagitiis perpetratis peniteri videmus, et gravi compunctione ingemiscere, non tam amore Dei quem offenderunt vel odio peccati quod commiserunt quam timore penae in quam se precipitari verentur. Qui in eo quoque iniqui permanent ...." While Abelard describes this as the weeping of those who remain permanently wicked, like Bernard, Richard of St-Victor refers to it as the weeping of the damned; *De duodecim patriarchis (Benjamin minor)* 10 (PL 196:7-8): "... quam sua scelera flendo damnare, et damnando flere considerat." Bernard's "et plorandi qui ita plorant" is conventional, e.g., John Chrysostom, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 31.2 (PG 57:373): "Ille luceat, ille lamentetur."

<sup>28</sup> SC 26.6.8 (SBO 1:176); cf., *Conf.* 4.7.12 (CCSL 27:46): "O dementiam nescientem diligere homines humaniter! O stultum hominem immoderate humana patientem! Quod ego tunc eram."

that I am carnal. Yes I am carnal, sold under sin (Rom. 7.14), destined to die, subject to punishment and sufferings. I am certainly not insensible to my punishment; to think that I shall die, that those who are mine will die, fills me with horror ... I feel it, the wound is deep.<sup>29</sup>

The feelings "in spite of myself" are strongly reminiscent of Augustine's: "Enjoyments that I should weep over contend with sorrows that I should rejoice over, and which side is victorious, I do not know" and Paul's: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7.19).<sup>30</sup> There is the Ciceronian "horror of death" and the "deep wound," but the conclusion, typical of Bernard, is a plea that his need: ess be comforted by the mercy of his fellows:

I implore you, let not mere conventional respect but your human affection draw you to me in my sorrow .... Let it be poured out before the eyes of my sons, who, knowing my misfortune, will judge my mourning more humanely and console me all the more sweetly.<sup>31</sup>

Bernard asks for sympathy in a moment of genuine human weakness. His tears express the pain of man's imperfection — "sold under sin." Conveyed in a reconstruction of the scene in which Augustine proves susceptible to grief over his mother's death, in grieving for his brother, Bernard demonstrates his humility.<sup>32</sup> His tears are not under godly direction in the narrow sense that would make them "right tears." Bodily and carnal, they are nonetheless worthy of compassion. Ascetic righteousness and all attempts at virtuous perfection are surrendered to natural human weakness. Bernard feels grief when his brother Gerard dies "in spite of himself"; his sensitivity to pain is "carnal," it "makes him a man." But, he implores, "Let your human affection draw you to me in sweet

<sup>29</sup> SC 26.6.9 (SBO 1:177): "Sentio, sentio vel invitus, quia nec fortitudo lapidum fortitudo mea, nec caro mea aenea est (Job 6.12); sentio prorsus et doleo, et dolor meus in conspectu meo semper (Ps. 37.18) .... Carnalem quis dixerit? Ego humanum non nego, sicut nec me hominem. Si ne hoc sufficit, nec carnalem negaverim. Nam et ego carnalis sum, venundatus sub peccato (Rom. 7.14), addictus morti, poenis et aerumnis obnoxius. Non sum, fateor, insensibilis ad poenas: mortem horreo meam et meorum .... sentio, laesus sum, et graviter." Trans. Walsh, *Song* 2:69 and mine. Cf. *Conf.* 4.6.11 (CCSL 27:45): "Credo ... hoc magis mortem, quae mihi eum abstulerat ... eam repente consumpturam omnes homines putabam ... et ideo mihi horrore erat uita ...."

<sup>30</sup> *Conf.* 10.28.39 (CCSL 27:238): "Contendunt lactitiae meae flendae cum lactandis maeroribus, et ex qua parte stet uictoria nescio."

<sup>31</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 26.6.8 (SBO 1.176): "Luctus meus humano, quaeso, pensetur affectu, non usu." SC 26.2.3 (SBO 1:171): "Exeat sane ad oculos filiorum, qui scientes incommodum, planctum humanius aestiment, dulcius consolentur." Trans. mine and Walsh, *Song*, 2:68.

<sup>32</sup> Ann Astell finds a "sharp contrast" between Augustine's and Bernard's grief scenes — a contrast which confirms the new genre of the Cistercian *consolatio*. She describes Augustine as "uncomfortable with his own emotional response," and Bernard as affirming the positive, God-willed value of grieving, making "public the depth of his affliction": *Song of Songs*, 123-24.

sympathy." "Weeping is not a sign of our infidelity, but an indicator of our condition."<sup>33</sup>

Just as Augustine describes the grief that he finally gives way to as an uncontrollable bursting forth (*prorumpere*) of emotion, so Bernard describes how expressions of feeling "are not produced by processes of the mind but by spontaneous impulses (*erumpere motu*)."<sup>34</sup> "Why is it that a free creature does not make herself mistress of her passions (*appetitus*) and rule them, but instead follows after them and becomes their follower (*sed sequitur et obsequitur*) like a maid?" Bernard asks rhetorically.<sup>35</sup> It is a rhetoric that we are already familiar with from our discussion of Augustine. If they cannot control even the body which they admit is so much the mind's inferior, Augustine asks of the Platonists, how could they possibly assert mastery over that far more troublesome area of the emotions? In a dialogue between body and soul written by Bernard, the body rebukes the soul for falling so low that it appears even less upright than the body itself!<sup>36</sup>

It is a simplification on a number of counts to view Bernard as "more optimistic" about the body than Augustine.<sup>37</sup> Bernard shares Augustine's care in avoiding dualism of mind and body and we should not mistake references to the spontaneity of the soul as references to bodily spontaneity *per se*. Bernard pointedly says, "I could control my tears but not my feeling of sadness." Tears are a controllable physical expression, but the feeling of sadness is beyond

<sup>33</sup> SC 26.8.13 (SBO 1:180): "Sic nec fletus utque hostis infidelitatis est signum, sed conditionis indicium."

<sup>34</sup> *Conf.* 8.12.28 (CCSL 27:130-31); SC 67.2. 3 (SBO 2:190): "[affectus]...est non nutu prodire animi, sed erumpere motu."

<sup>35</sup> SC 82.3.6 (SBO 2:296): "Quid, quod libera creatura sibi subditum appetitum non regit domina, sed sequitur et obsequitur ut ancilla?" Unlike other translations (e.g., Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, trans. Irene M. Edmonds, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 40 [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980], 177), I have emphasized the femininity of the subject as a "mistress" and a "maid" rather than a master and a slave. Since Bernard characterises the bride's perfection in her nuptial knowledge, it seems appropriate to view her less perfect state as akin to her maidenhood and for this reason I have translated *ancilla* as "maid." Although the rhetorical point is generally Augustinian (cf., for e.g. *De civ. Dei* 19.27 [CCSL 48:697-98]), Augustine uses Platonic master/slave and Pauline battle metaphors. Bernard's feminisation is new.

<sup>36</sup> SC 24.2.6 (SBO 1:158): "'Erubescere, anima mea,' ait corpus, 'in mei consideratione.'"

<sup>37</sup> Whilst Sommerfeldt interprets Bernard as generally more optimistic about the body, he describes how "now and again, Bernard seems to reflect Augustine's hostility to the body as well ... a Neoplatonic or Augustinian denigration of the body"; *Spiritual Teachings*, 3.

suppression. The body expresses a truth which is held in the heart.<sup>38</sup> The body's language, its sobs, sighs, screams, yawns — even its burp, is the utterance of the soul, the language of the *affectus*, the sap in the trunk of the tree.<sup>39</sup> And when the language of the *affectus* discloses itself through the body “even against its own will” in irrepressible spontaneous impulses,<sup>40</sup> the ungovernability of a mind at war with itself is demonstrated. Bernard instructs his novices to “disagree with yourself,” “become your own adversary” and “fight indefatigably against yourself.”<sup>41</sup> Emphasising a non-dualist interpretation of Plato's famous description of the mind controlling physical lust like a charioteer his horse, Bernard describes how the mind, like a charioteer, must control the “chariot of the *mind*,” bringing every carnal emotion into captivity.<sup>42</sup> And ultimately, of course, the mind is unable to do so. “Fighting against yourself” is a “hard thing,” and if it is attempted with your own strength “it will be as if you were trying to stop the charge of a rushing torrent with one little finger, or as if you were trying to make the Jordan run backwards” (Ps. 113.3).<sup>43</sup> Instead of being free, the human creature cannot make herself master of her passions but instead trails after them like a slave.

For both Augustine and Bernard, the question of dualism — whether it is a mind warring with the body or with mental emotion — is eclipsed by the ultimately more important issue of the *method of governance*. Like Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard applies Augustine's Pauline criticism of the way of the law to traditional Benedictine emphasis on obedience. Although they have embarked on the spiritual path and “adopted a better life,” novices may still fall into the trap

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Bernard's lesson on burping, *SC* 67.3.4 (SBO 2:191), quoted below p. 149 n. 56; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in nativitate Domini* 2.2 (SBO 4:252): “... denique sensus omnis ab anima est.”

<sup>39</sup> On body language see *SC* 67.2.3 (SBO 2:190) cited below p. 93 n. 56; on the burp see *SC* 67.3.4 (SBO 2:191). Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in nativitate Domini* 2.2 (SBO 4:252): “Quis non videat, fratres, quantum corpori praestet anima? Numquid non truncus esset insensibilis caro inanimata?”

<sup>40</sup> *SC* 67.2.3 (SBO 2:190): “Habent suas voces affectus, per quas se, etiam cum nolunt, produnt ...” On their spontaneity see below p. 93 n. 56.

<sup>41</sup> *SC* 85.1.1 (SBO 2:308): “... dissentias tecum ... tibimet adverseris ... contra teipsum infatigabiliter proclieris ...”

<sup>42</sup> *SC* 85.2.5 (SBO 2:310): “... veluti quemdam animi currum, bonus auriga reget, et in captivitatem rediget omnem carnalem affectum ...” (2 Cor. 10.5). Plato, *Phaedrus* 246: 253-57.

<sup>43</sup> *SC* 85.1.1 (SBO 2:308): “Id quidem durum. Si tuis attentaveris viribus, tale erit, ac si in uno digitorum tuorum torrentis impetum sistere, aut ipsum denuo coneris Iordanem convertere retrorsum” (Ps. 113.3).

of habitual obedience. Adopting a Ciceronian tone, Bernard notes that the obvious things about such a brother appear pleasing, his body is disciplined and his appearance correct. He seems modest in his appearance.<sup>44</sup> But the flowers must be judged by their novelty, and by the promise of fruits rather than by the fruits themselves.<sup>45</sup> What threatens the blossoms is the cold — the frigidity of seasoned habit that corrodes a monk's spiritual progress however disciplined his appearance. In contrast to the metaphors that emphasise the dynamism of spontaneous *affectus*, the body in which the soul is stifled suffers rigor mortis.

Who will endure the cold? (Ps. 147.17) If this cold once penetrates the soul when the soul is neglectful and the spirit asleep, and if no one is there to curb it, then it reaches into the soul's interior. It descends to the depths of the heart and the recesses of the mind, paralyses the affections, obstructs the paths of counsel, unsteadies the light of judgement, fetters the liberty of the spirit, and soon — as appears to bodies sick with fever — a rigour of the mind takes over: vigour slackens, energies grow languid, repugnance for austerity increases, fear of poverty disquiets, the soul shrivels, grace is withdrawn, time means boredom, reason is lulled to sleep, the spirit is quenched (1 Thess. 5.19), the fresh fervour wanes away, a fastidious lukewarmness weighs down, brotherly love grows cold (Matth. 24.12), pleasure attracts, security is a trap, old habits return.<sup>46</sup>

Those who have a "disciplined appearance" and "proper deportment" seem pleasing enough. But Bernard discredits the self-governing, righteous man, calling him a "liar" and a "hypocrite," just as Augustine calls *apatheia* "inhuman."<sup>47</sup> An innate and interior justice may "cry out" to human reason, and reason knows this goodness, but nonetheless, it is human nature to turn everything to its own selfish advantage because it is driven by voracious and

<sup>44</sup> SC 63.2.6 (SBO 2:165): "Placent, fateor, quae in facie sunt ... qui foris apparet, corporum cultus et vestium ... aspectus verecundior ...."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., "... ipsa sui novitate flores censenda sunt, et spes fructuum magis quam fructus."

<sup>46</sup> SC 63.2.5 (SBO 2:165): "A facie frigoris quis sustinebit? (Ps. 147.17) Hoc frigus si semel animam, animae, ut assolet, incuria, spiritu dormitante, pervaserit, ac nemine deinde, quod absit, inhibente, ad interiora eius pervenerit, descenderit in viscera cordis et sinum mentis, concusserit affectiones, occupaverit consilii semitas, perturbaverit iudicii lumen, libertatem addixerit spiritus, mox, ut in corpore solet evenire febricitantibus, subit quidam animi rigor; et vigor lentescit, languor fingitur virium, horror austeritatis intenditur, timor sollicitat paupertatis, contrahitur animus, subtrahitur gratia, protrahitur longitudo vitae, sepitur ratio, spiritus exstinguitur (1 Thess. 5.19), defervescit novitius fervor, ingravescit tepor fastidiosus, refrigescit fraterna caritas (Matth. 24.12), blanditur voluptas, fallit securitas, revocat consuetudo." Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs III*, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 31 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 167.

<sup>47</sup> *De gradibus* 1.4.14 (SBO 3:27); *De gradibus* 1.5.16 (SBO 3:29); Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 14.9 (CCSL 48:430), see above p. 40 n. 69.

ungovernable desires. “‘For everyone looks out for his own interests’ (Phil. 2.21). And again, ‘The thoughts and senses of man are inclined towards evil’” (Gen. 8.21).<sup>48</sup> Reason (*ratio*) itself has done nothing wrong, and indeed is entirely right when it heeds the inner cry of justice. But the cry of justice falls on deaf ears so long as the will is obstinate. Discretion is lifeless without the fervour of love.<sup>49</sup> And the will that is *forced* into adherence with goodness through law will become unendurably cold, like an automaton.

In one of his sermons, Bernard gives a “*cur Deus homo?*” that — like Anselm’s — is informed by the Pauline distinction between law and grace, obedience and freedom. Bernard thus teaches that Christ’s Incarnation was necessary after it became clear that the way of the law had failed. Humanity had become epitomised by a proud man with a heart of stone. To win man back to Him and to His righteousness, God responded by threatening man, making him afraid and desperate, raining down famine, pestilence and war on Israel. But the fearful man remained obstinate. Then God offered to fulfil the man’s greed, promising him plentiful lands of milk and honey. But what was not yet tangible to the man failed to gain his interest.<sup>50</sup> There is a familiar moral lesson behind this storytelling. So long as the law strives to bring man to goodness through an obedience motivated by fear and reward, then there is no avenue for genuine human restoration, which requires a demonstration of true voluntary goodness.

In Bernard’s thought, the relationship between knowing and feeling, *ratio/intellectus* and *affectus*, expresses the moral relationship between the

<sup>48</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De dil.* 2.6 (SBO 3:124): “Clamat nempe intus ei innata, et non ignota rationi, iustitia ... sicut scriptum est: ‘Omnes quae sua sunt quaerunt’ (Phil. 2.21), et item: ‘Prone sunt sensus et cogitationes hominis in malum’” (Gen. 8.21).

<sup>49</sup> SC 23.3.8 (SBO 1:144): “Virtus quidem discretionis absque caritatis fervore iacet ....” Trans. Walsh. *Song* 2:32.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones de diversis* Sermo 29.2 (SBO 6/1:221): “videns enim Deus homines omnino carnales effectos, tantam eis dulcedinem exhibuit in carne, ut durissimi cordis sit quisquis eum toto affectu non diligat. Volens siquidem nobilem creaturam hominem recuperare: ‘Si,’ inquit, ‘invitum coegero, asinum habebō, non hominem; quandoquidem non libens veniet, nec spontaneus .... Numquid asinis dabo regnum meum? ... Ut ergo habeam voluntarium, terrebo eum, si forte convertatur et vivat.’ Et comminatus est acerbiora quae excogitari possunt: tenebras aeternas, vermes immortales, ignem inextinguibilem. Cum autem nec si homo revocaretur, ait: ‘Non solum timidus, sed etiam cupidus est; promittam ei quod potissimum desiderabile videatur.’ Desiderant homines argentum et aurum et similia; sed super haec omnia vitam desiderant. Manifestum est hoc, et valde manifestum. ‘Si,’ inquit, ‘tantoperè desiderant miseram hanc et laboriosam vitam et momentaneum, quantum diligent meam quietam, aeternam, beatam?’ Promisit itaque vitam aeternam ....” *Sermones de diversis* Sermo 29.3 (SBO 6/1:211-12): “Videns autem quod nihil proficeret ....” Cited in Gilson. *Mystical Theology*, 78.

knowledge of righteousness that the mind holds in agreement with the law, and the unruly inclination of the will. The truth inherent in the law is represented by the rational mind that “knows what is right” — “reason that cries out the proper truths of good behaviour.” Lecturing to his monks, Bernard tells them: “I do not doubt that the understanding of all of you who are here present has been enlightened, but I am going to show you ... that your inclination[s] have not been purified equally.”<sup>51</sup> A monk may *know* things without feeling them, but he is not perfected by that knowledge alone. Augustine characterises Platonist self-sufficiency in knowledge as equivalent to Adam’s original sin of pride.<sup>52</sup> For Bernard — perhaps to an even greater degree than for Augustine — the rationalist path signifies the “way of the law.” Of the ten downward steps of pride that lead to excommunication in Bernard’s *Steps of Humility and Pride*, the first is the urge towards independent knowledge.<sup>53</sup> Bernard cleverly subverts the Platonist and Stoic ideal of the wise man’s perfect freedom from emotion by his maxim that: “Understanding may make them learned (*doctores*) but *emotion (affectus)* makes them wise-men (*sapientes*).”<sup>54</sup>

Knowing the law is all very well, but it is not enough. Following the law is the way of hirelings and mercenaries and not the new spiritual freedom of the sons of Christ.<sup>55</sup> The monk whose actions betray that he knows what is right but is ambivalent about doing it, suffers from psychological rigor mortis. Bernard delights instead in the spontaneity and disobedience of a spirit whose enthusiasm transcends even the restricted mode of the laws and rules of language itself.

Are the lamentations of mourners, the sobs of those who grieve, the sighs of those in pain, the sudden frenzied screams of those in fear, the yawns of the replete — are these the result of habit? Do they constitute a reasoned discourse, a deliberate utterance, a premeditated speech? Most certainly such

<sup>51</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in ascensione domini* 3.6 (SBO 5:134): “Non dubito ego intellectum omnium vestrum, qui hic estis, illuminatum esse; sed non affectum aequè esse purgatum...” Here he uses *intellectus* rather than *ratio*.

<sup>52</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:434).

<sup>53</sup> On *curiositas*, see *De gradibus* 2.10.28 (SBO 3:38).

<sup>54</sup> SC 23.5.14 (SBO 1:147): “Instructio doctos reddit, affectio sapientes.”

<sup>55</sup> *De dil.* 13.36 (SBO 3:151): “... nec iam servili timore coerecar, nec mercenaria cupiditate illiciar, sed agar Spiritu tuo, spiritu libertatis, quo aguntur filii tui ... nec servi aut mercenarii sunt, sed filii.”

expressions of feeling are not produced by the processes of the mind, but by spontaneous impulses.<sup>56</sup>

“It is alright to surrender our mind.”<sup>57</sup>

In the new religion of Christ, the shift from law to freedom is played out in the liberating surrender of reason’s law to emotion’s freedom. Bernard’s *cur Deus homo?* continues thus: When God could not win man back by scaring and rewarding him, He said to Himself: “There is one thing left, for the human heart does not harbour fear and cupidity alone but also love, and no attraction is stronger than love.”<sup>58</sup>

In one respect, the way of the lustful man is better than that of the forcibly upright: in its honesty. However painful it is to look upon him, he is, undeniably, a natural man. Bernard addresses even the Pope with a test of hypocrisy:

If you scatter all these things and blow them away from the face of your consideration ... you will catch sight of a naked man who is poor, wretched, miserable (Apoc. 3.17), a man grieving because he is man, ashamed because he is naked, weeping because he was born.<sup>59</sup>

When the prophet David realises the truth about his nature he bursts out in the painful but true statement that “Every man is a liar” (Ps. 115.11).<sup>60</sup> Bernard humbly sees himself as a proud man and feels the humility of failed humility.<sup>61</sup> Please God, he prays, strike me down, *lest my own strength carry me to my ruin*.<sup>62</sup> In his tears over Gerard he discovered a pain that was ever with him — a pain that

<sup>56</sup> SC 67.2.3 (SBO 2:190): “Numquid dolentium planctus, maerentiumve singultus vel gemitus percussorum, itemque paventium subitas et efferatas clamitationes, seu etiam saturatorum ructus, aut usus creat, aut ratio excitat, aut deliberatio ordinat, aut praemeditatio format? Eiusmodi certum est non nutu prodire animi, sed erumpere motu.” Trans. Edmonds, *Song* 4:6-7.

<sup>57</sup> SC 56.3.7 (SBO 2:118): “... libet animum laxare...”

<sup>58</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones de diversis* Sermo 29.3 (SBO 6/1:211-12): “Videns autem quod nihil proficeret: ‘Unum,’ inquit, ‘restat adhuc. Inest homini non solum timor et cupiditas, sed et amor, nec quidquam in eo vehementius ad trahendum.’” Cited in Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 78.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione* 2.9.18 (SBO 3:426): “Si cuncta haec ... dissipes et exsuffles a facie considerationis tuae, occurret tibi homo nudus, et pauper, et miser, et miserabilis (Apoc. 3.17): homo dolens quod homo sit, erubescens quod nudus sit, plorans quod natus sit ....” Translated in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 13, *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*, trans. John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 70. This work was written for Pope Eugene III, who had been a monk at Clairvaux. The passage is similar to William of St-Thierry’s description of the human child’s painful birth to a “wicked stepmother,” and to other passages in Bernard’s writings; William of St-Thierry, *De natura corporis et animae* 2 (PL 180: 715); cf., SC 24.2.6 (SBO 1:157-58).

<sup>60</sup> *De gradibus* 1.4.15-1.5.17 (SBO 3:28-29): “‘Omnis homo mendax’” (Ps. 115.11).

<sup>61</sup> Bernard’s fears to speak about humility convincingly lest success in doing so may make him proud; *De gradibus* Praefatio (SBO 3:16).

<sup>62</sup> *De gradibus* 1.9.25. (SBO 3:35); full passage quoted below p. 106 n. 114.

made him at once both carnal and human. By contrast, Bernard describes the proud man — who says “I am rich and in need of nothing,” a “man who judges, spurns and ridicules other men,” a “man who fails to consider himself” — as a man *who has not yet become a human being*, and as a man who *has not yet been restored to a truly human condition*.<sup>63</sup>

### *Narcissism and Misericordia*

He has not yet become a man who perceives his own poverty (Lam. 3.1). He says, “I am rich and in need of nothing,” although he is poor and naked and wretched and pitiable (Apoc. 3.17-18). He has nothing of the spirit of gentleness (1 Cor. 4.21) with which he could instruct those who are caught in sin (Gal. 6.1) bearing in mind his own susceptibility to temptation. He knows nothing of tears of compunction. Rather he rejoices when he has done wrong, he exalts in his worst deeds (Prov. 2.14). He is one of those to whom the Lord says, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will weep” (Luc. 6.25).<sup>64</sup>

Driven by narcissism, human beings want only what will improve themselves. The restlessness of self-love (cupidity) causes men to strive more and more “in an insatiable ambition to go higher.” A man “is never satisfied with something that lacks the qualities he thinks it should have.” A man with a beautiful wife will still look covetously at another woman (Bernard’s example!), a wealthy man envies the riches of another. In his egotism, man seeks only his self-perfection. But pride could seek forever and never find what it is looking for. Men who chase after everything they desire without rest end up tortured by vanity and walking around in circles.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> SC 44.4.6 (SBO 2:48): “... revertetur in hominem ...”; SC 45.4.7 (SBO 2:48) “... redisse quodammodo is homo in hominem.” The remainder of these quotes are cited immediately below n. 64.

<sup>64</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones ad clericos de conversione* 19.33 (SBO 4:110): “... needum factus est vir videns paupertatem suam (Lam. 3.1). sed dicit quia ‘dives sum et nullius egeo,’ cum sit pauper, et nudus. et miser, et miserabilis (Apoc. 3.17). Nihil illi de spiritu mansuetudinis (1 Cor. 4.21). quo praecoepatos in delicto possit instruere (Gal. 6.1), considerans seipsum, ne et ipse tenetur. Compunctionis lacrimas nesciens, laetatur magis cum male facerit, et exultat in rebus pessimis. Nimirum unus eorum est, quibus Dominus ait: ‘Vae vobis qui ridetis nunc, quoniam fletibus!’” (Luc. 6.25) Trans. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> *De dil.* 7.18 (SBO 3:134): “Inest omni utenti ratione naturaliter pro sua semper aestimatione atque intentione appetere potiora, et nulla re esse contentum, cui quod deest, iudicet praefendum. Nam et qui ... uxorem habet speciosam, petulanti oculo vel animo respicit pulchriorem ... et

"I suspect the love which seems to be founded on gain," Bernard says elsewhere. If the hope of gain is removed love is readily diminished or even extinguished altogether. Such a love is "impure" "as it desires some return."<sup>66</sup> In his parable on the reasons for the Incarnation, Bernard describes how, before Christ came, God had tried to win man back to him by promises of reward. But this strategy failed because man was not interested in what he could not immediately enjoy, what was not tangible to him. As we have seen, this parable is a moral critique of the way of the law. Goodness maintained only out of some hope of reward reflects no truly righteous inclination. The behaviour of the man whose ambition (for a better wife, for greater riches, etc.) masquerades as love follows the same pattern as the behaviour of the man whose goodness is motivated by reward. Just as one fails to express true goodness, so the other fails to express pure love. The moral problem of how to be good without being motivated by reward is directly related to the psychological problem that humanity loves vainly, in a way that seeks better reward for the self. "For everyone looks out for his own interests." Man was lost to God when he obeyed the law only for the sake of rewards.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in his *Cur Deus homo?* Anselm of Canterbury argues that, under the law, man's subservience is demonstrated by the way in which he offers God only what he is obliged to. Obligatory giving is an enforced goodness. Following Paul's definition of the "free gift," Anselm interprets the Incarnation as a demonstration of moral liberation effected by a new form of giving, a truly voluntary giving. Bernard's critique of narcissism suggests the influence of Anselm's interpretation of Paul's free gift. Just as, for Anselm, goodness is demonstrated by voluntary giving, so for Bernard, true loving is demonstrated by its voluntary nature: Pure love has no self-interest.<sup>67</sup> The impure love of narcissism demonstrates the same slavish spirit that characterises Anselm's obligatory giving. For Anselm, Christ makes satisfaction because He is

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possidens multas divitias, invidet ditiori .... Annon insatiabili ambitione magis et magis totis viribus conari ad altiora videmus? ... animus inani labore discurrens, fatigetur, non quietur ...."

<sup>66</sup> SC 83.2.5 (SBO 2:301): "Suspectus est mihi amor, cui aliud quid adipiscendi spes suffragari videtur. Infirmitas est, qui forte, spe subtracta, aut exstinguitur, aut minuitur. Impurus est, qui et aliud cupit." Trans. Edmonds, *Song*, 4:185.

able to freely give to God. (He also calls this a “demonstration of love.”)<sup>68</sup> So Bernard expresses the human problem of narcissism as making it “impossible for anyone to *want*, of his own free will, to give back to God the gifts he has received and not want to keep them for himself.”<sup>69</sup> The similarity in their thinking is obvious. For Bernard, as for Anselm, the voluntary adherence to the law that characterises the new Christian freedom is an ideal of voluntary love. Just as Anselm criticises obedience, Bernard criticises the natural human inclination towards narcissism because it fails to enact the freedom of voluntary goodness and voluntary love.

Bernard goes so far as to say that it is *impossible* for man to want to give back the gifts that he owes to God and not to want to keep them for himself. Even though they owe their very self to God, humanity still fails to wholeheartedly love him.<sup>70</sup> Bernard’s conviction of the pervasiveness of human vanity is not simply a depressive mood he falls into every now and then that temporarily knocks him off the spiritual path. Instead, his belief that narcissism is the determining force of the will’s inclination is emphatic. Since the will only acts in a voluntary fashion when it is motivated by self-love, if voluntary love is possible, self-love must somehow be intrinsic to it.

As Gilson argues in *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, for Bernard, all forms of love are in fact self-love.<sup>71</sup> Following a classical theme (which as O’Donovan and others have shown is also central to Augustine’s idea of love) for Bernard, all love is a form of self-love because self-identification is intrinsic to love.<sup>72</sup> We love people in whom we *identify* something of ourselves. It is a

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., “Purus amor mercenarius non est.” SC 83.2.4 (SBO 2:300): “Is per se sufficit, is per se placet, et propter se. Ipse meritum, ipse praemium est sibi. Amor praeter se non requirit causam, non fructum: fructus eius, usus eius. Amo, quia amo; amo, ut amem.”

<sup>68</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, “*Meditatio redemptionis humanae*” (SAO 3:87); CDH 1.6 (SAO 2:54).

<sup>69</sup> *De dil.* 2.6 (SBO 3:124): “... immo impossibile est, suis scilicet quempiam liberive arbitrii viribus semel accepta a Deo, ad Dei ex toto convertere voluntatem, et non magis ad propriam retorquere, eaque sibi tamquam propria retinere.” Translated in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride: On Loving God*, ed. and trans. C. Backhouse (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 88.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., “... ex toto se illum diligere debeat, cui totum se debere ... Verum id ... impossibile est ... ad Dei ... convertere voluntatem.”

<sup>71</sup> Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, p. 221 n. 24.

<sup>72</sup> O’Donovan, *Problem of Self-Love*; on the connection between Augustine and Bernard on this theme see also: Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, p. 221 n. 24; on self-love in Augustine see, for example, *De doctrina Christiana de vera religione* (henceforth cited as *De doct. Christ.*) 1.26.27 (CCSL 32.21).

function of the natural order. Bernard argues, that like should seek like.<sup>73</sup> Your neighbour is “what you are.”<sup>74</sup> When Augustine’s friend died, he felt that he had lost a part of himself.<sup>75</sup> Following a Ciceronian teaching about friendship, Bernard says that he “understand[s] a friend who comes to me as none other than myself, no one surely is dearer to me, no one closer.”<sup>76</sup>

Behind the inescapable narcissism is a hidden spiritual truth. The likeness that is intrinsic to friendship and to love is a unifying force. In so far as two friends share a likeness, “their likeness makes them one.”<sup>77</sup> The lover subsumes the different identity of the other into her own by loving the other as herself. “When what is perfect comes, what is partial will be done away with (1 Cor 13.10); and the love between them will be chaste and consummated, full recognition ... similitudo perfected.”<sup>78</sup> The fact that love of another, as anything truly *other*, is impossible (instead one loves another only as oneself) reveals the true spiritual nature of love, that: “Whoever adheres to God, is one Spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6.17).<sup>79</sup> The “all-are-one” notion of the Spirit is most closely reflected in human life in the narcissistic way in which we love another as ourself. “I am perfected in oneness” (Cant. 6.8).<sup>80</sup> The unification of lovers transcends all of the fragmentation and alienation that characterise human experience.

Through the process of identification, diverse identities merge into one. When I love another, I actually love the reflection of myself (which may be a highly ambitious and unrealistic one) that I see in another person. When a man

<sup>73</sup> SC 82.3.7 (SBO 2:297): “Et certe de ratione naturae, similis similem quaerit.”

<sup>74</sup> SC 50.3.7 (SBO 2:82): “Iam vero proximus, quem se oportet diligere sicut teipsum (Matth.19.19) ... qui id est quod tu.”

<sup>75</sup> *Conf.* 5.2.2 (CCSL 27:58).

<sup>76</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in rogationibus* (SBO 5:121): “Ego quidem amicum venientem ad me, non alium intelligo quam meipsum. Nemo quippe carior mihi, nemo germanior est.” Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for the Summer Season: Liturgical Sermons from Rogationtide and Pentecost*, trans. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 53 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 27. Gilson has pointed out Cicero’s influence on Bernard, *Mystical Theology*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> SC 27.4.6 (SBO 1:186): “... unam conformitas facit.” Trans. Walsh, *Song*, 2:79.

<sup>78</sup> SC 82.3.8 (SBO 2:297): “Siquidem veniente quod perfectum est, evacuabitur quod ex parte est; eritque ad alterutrum casta et consummata dilectio ... visio manifesta ... similitudo perfecta.”

<sup>79</sup> SC 83.3.6 (SBO 2:302): “Qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est” (1 Cor.6.17). Cf. *De dil.* 15.39 (SBO 3:153). Casey describes this as “one of the most significant texts in Bernard’s spirituality,” which “summarises his whole approach”; *A Thirst for God*, 201. McGinn refers to it as his “signature text,” citing the results of Raffaele Fassetta’s research that Bernard uses the text fifty-four times in his writings; Raffaele Fassetta, “Le rôle de l’Esprit-Saint dans la vie spirituelle selon Bernard de Clairvaux,” *La dottrina della vita spirituale nella opere di San Bernardo di Clairvaux*, 359-87, 384; cited in McGinn, *Presence of God*, 2: p. 509 n. 331.

loves a woman for her beauty and seeks another because she is more beautiful, his self-esteem is boosted. Loving her beauty is a way of expressing something that he values — something that he feels himself worthy of. A man “is never satisfied with something that lacks the qualities he thinks it should have.” Aristotle and Cicero taught that by recognising virtue in a friend, one comes to know oneself as virtuous.<sup>81</sup> When we love people who embody the virtues we admire, we identify them as being like ourselves and we share in their admirable virtues.

But, Bernard teaches, vain love lacks permanence for it is always threatened by the departure of the object by which it is rewarded. Such a love lacks moral strength because it expresses the servitude of doing something only for the sake of reward. But even above and beyond these important issues, the overriding reason for the failure of vanity is that it is based on an illusory self-representation. Ultimately, the problem with vain love is that it is not based on true self-knowledge. It is a false identification — the man with the beautiful wife is not truly beautiful himself. One day he will realise this and when he does his wife will feel foreign to him, a stranger in whom he no longer recognises himself. When the prophet David falls “very low in his own eyes,” he laments: “Before when I thought that I was something, I realised I was nothing.”<sup>82</sup>

“Fear the eyes of the gazelle” is the theme of one of Bernard’s sermons on the Song of Songs.<sup>83</sup> The bridegroom of the Song is identified as “like a gazelle” “leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills” (Cant. 2.8). At one stage in the Song, the bridegroom asks his beloved to: “Turn away your eyes from me, for they make me want to run away” (Cant. 6.5). In the gazelle’s eyes the hunter sees a frail timidity, he feels the animal weakness before his power. And yet even in his Majesty, the hunter quails when he looks into the eyes of his defenceless prey. In the Incarnation, God chooses to win man back through love “because there is no attraction stronger than love.” “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it” (Cant. 8.7).

<sup>80</sup> SC 27.4.6 (SBO 1:186): “Una est perfecta mea” (Cant. 6.8).

<sup>81</sup> As O’Donovan explains, citing Cicero, *Laelius* 21.80 and 26.98; *Problem of Self-Love*, 3-4.

Opening the heart is like a narrow shaft of light in a grate that allows the bridegroom to peek through. (Cant. 2.9)<sup>84</sup> A man comes to a “deep heart” (Ps. 63.7) when he has seen the truth about himself.<sup>85</sup> The proud man has “divested himself of his humanity”<sup>86</sup>; he “has not yet become a human being,” and has “not yet been restored to a truly human condition.” There is truth in the common proverb that: “The healthy man does not know what the sick man feels.”<sup>87</sup>

“The first act of pity sustains the man ‘returning to his own heart’ (Is. 46.8) and enables him to enter the secret places of his being.”<sup>88</sup> Self-pity is the way in which you make reconciliation with yourself.

If you want God to be merciful to you, then you must yourself be merciful towards your soul. Flood your bed every night with your tears, remember to drench your couch with your weeping (Ps. 6.7). If you have compassion on yourself, if you struggle on in groanings of penance — for this is mercy’s first step — then you will arrive at mercy. And if you are perhaps a great and frequent sinner and seek great mercy and frequent forgiveness (Ps. 50.3) you must also work at increasing your mercy. *You are reconciled to yourself whereas you had become a burden to yourself* (Job 7.20) because you had set yourself up against God.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *De gradibus* 1.4.15 (SBO 3:28): “... valde vilui mihi ex mei consideratione.... Ego quidem, cum adhuc veritatem non nossem, aliquid me putabam esse, cum nihil essem.” On the significance of the penitential figure of David in the Middle Ages see Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, chapter four.

<sup>83</sup> *SC* 55.1.2 (SBO 2:112): “... time oculos capreae.” *SC* 55.2.4 (SBO 2:113): “... oporteat vereri: oculos capreae.”

<sup>84</sup> *SC* 56.1.1 (SBO 2:114): “Respiciens per fenestras, prospiciens per cancellos” (Cant. 2.9).

<sup>85</sup> *De gradibus* 1.4.15 (SBO 3:27-28): “Cum autem veritate inventa in se ... ‘ascendat homo ad cor altum’” (Ps. 63.7).

<sup>86</sup> *SC* 44.4.6 (SBO 2:48): “Inde homo, tamquam omnino exutus homine ....”

<sup>87</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.6 (SBO 3:21): “Bene namque convenit illis illud vulgare proverbium: ‘Nescit sanus quid sentiat aeger, aut plenus quid patiatu r ieiunus.’”

<sup>88</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo super psalmum ‘Qui habitat’* 11.9 (SBO 4:454-55): “Haec miseratio prima excipit ‘redeuntem ad cor’ (Is.46.8), et haec intra ipsa viscerum actitatur arcana.” Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on Conversion: On Conversion, a Sermon to Clerics and Lenten Sermons on the Psalm, ‘He who dwells,’* trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 25 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 209. This *imitatio* is the most important meaning of tears in Bernard’s oeuvre, which contains hundreds of references to weeping (they have been counted); see Leclercq, introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 36.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones ad clericos de conversione* 16.29 (SBO 4:104-5): “Miserere ergo animae tuae, qui Deum tibi vis misereri. Lava per singulas noctes lectum tuum (Ps. 6.7), lacrimis tuis stratum tuum rigare memento. Si compateris tibi ipsi, si laboras in gemitu paenitentiae — primus hic gradus misericordiae est — misericordiam utique consequeris. Quod si forte magnus et multus peccator es, et magnam quaeris misericordiam ac multitudinem miserationum (Ps. 50.3), tu quoque misericordiam tuam magnificare labora: reconciliatus es tibi ipsi; nam et tibi gravis factus eras (Job 7.20) quod positus esses contrarius Deo.” Trans. Saïd, 65; cf. Augustine became “a problem to himself,” *Conf.* 4.4.8 (CCSL 27:59-60).

The first act of self-pity is an imitation of “the great works of divine pity,” feeling *compunctio* with him who was pierced (*punctus est*) for him.”<sup>90</sup> “When I had come to know Christ, that is, to imitate his humility, I saw the truth.”<sup>91</sup> When David is “led along his way by truth” he “grieved at what he found in himself, now he sees the same in others.”<sup>92</sup> Bernard describes how: “You experience yourself as you are” when your “experience of love of yourself” is simultaneous to “the feeling that you feel towards Christ” and you feel unloved without him.<sup>93</sup> “To share a suffering heart (*cor miserum*) with another’s suffering (*alienam miseriam*), you must first know your own suffering, so that you find your neighbour’s mind in your own and — depending on how much you learn from yourself — you will be able to help him.”<sup>94</sup>

To relate to a human being by recognising the limits that define oneself in them involves identification with their human pain, their suffering embodiment, their emotional alienation. If we identify with another in their need, in their loss, their lack of ability to find and love themselves in another, then we are truly recognising our human self. In the Incarnation, God took on a likeness to man and suffered as a man so that human beings would, essentially, learn a way to love themselves.<sup>95</sup> He became our quintessential humanity, a suffering humanity. Bernard cites the text of Hebrews 2.17: “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect.”<sup>96</sup> And says: “He has sought me as I am.”<sup>97</sup>

When Christ was forsaken, when he became weak and his body suffered mightily, he shared our distance from perfection and the loss of selfhood that

<sup>90</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo super psalmum ‘Qui habitat’* 11.9 (SBO 4:454-55): “Imitatur enim, qui eiusmodi est, magnum illud magnae miserationis opus, compunctus cum eo, qui prior pro eo punctus est.” Trans. Saïd, 209.

<sup>91</sup> *De gradibus* 1.4.15 (SBO 3:28): “At postquam in Christum credendo, id est eius humilitatem imitando, veritatem agnovi ....”

<sup>92</sup> *De gradibus* 1.5.16 (SBO 3:29): “... Propheta per ducatum veritatis, quodque in se lugebat videns in aliis ....”

<sup>93</sup> *SC* 50.3.6 (SBO 2:82): “Sapies ... tibi prout es, cum ipso experimento amoris tui et affectionis quam ad teipsum habebis, nihil dignum te esse invenies quod vel a teipso ametur, nisi propter ipsum, qui sine ipso es nihil.” Trans. Walsh and Edmonds, 35.

<sup>94</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.6 (SBO 3:21): “Sed ut ob alienam miseriam cor miserum habeas, oportet tuam prius agnoscas, ut proximi mentem in tua invenias, et ex te noveris qualiter illi subvenias ....”

<sup>95</sup> This is the lesson of *De gradibus* 1.3.6-12 (SBO 3:20-26); Gilson comments: “That is why God made himself man and suffered death — to gain our love by letting us see his own.” *Mystical Theology*, 78.

<sup>96</sup> *SC* 28.1.3 (SBO 1:194): “... dicente Propheta ... ‘Unde debuit fratribus per omnia similari’” (Heb. 2.17).

<sup>97</sup> *SC* 84.1.6 (SBO 2:306): “... talem ... quesivit”; trans. Edmonds, *Song* 4:192.

drives the human quest of self-love. However, by *sharing* this with us he demonstrated the essence of unification in which perfection of love consists. Although before we had been a burden to ourselves, through pitying ourselves we achieve self-reconciliation. Learning to love her true lost self through compassion, the Bride overcomes and rectifies the very loss of self that defines her.

### *Ascent and Descent*

The ultimate prototype for Bernard's famous oscillations between supposed spiritual enlightenment and supposed humility is 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. In a context where Paul is being pressured to give "proof that Christ is speaking in me" (2 Cor. 13.3), he gives evidence of the third-heaven visitation of "a man he knows," but then declares that he will refrain from boasting of visions because what a man "sees in me or hears from me" is "sufficient" to reveal the power of Christ. In this passage, which I shall quote at length because its full context is important, we have the classic pattern of vision and renunciation that structures Bernard's spirituality:

2 Cor. 12.1-10: I must boast (*gloriarī*), there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I will to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. *But I refrain from it, so that no one may think of me more than he sees in me or hears from me.* And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." *I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with

weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.<sup>98</sup>

Another vital prototype for Bernard is Augustine's interpretation of the 2 Corinthians passage in book seven of the *Confessions*. In the context of describing his conversion from Platonist books to the writings of Paul, Augustine describes the lesson of weakness he had to learn:

I was not stable in the enjoyment of my God. I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things. This weight was my sexual habit (*consuetudo carnalis*) .... I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you; but I did not find it until I embraced 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2.5) ... to possess my God, the humble Jesus, I was not yet humble enough. I did not know what his weakness was meant to teach ... [that] [T]hey are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak. They see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our 'coat of skin' (Gen. 3.21). In their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which rises and lifts them up.<sup>99</sup>

These are the prototypes for the important yet puzzling passages of Bernard's *On Loving God* in which he describes the fourth and highest degree of love:

The person who attains the fourth degree of love is happy indeed .... How can flesh and blood, and dust from the ground, attain such heights? When can the mind experience this kind of love being so imbued with divine love that it forgets itself .... Anybody who has this experience, even if only rarely, or just once in his lifetime and then for only a moment, is indeed blessed by God and

<sup>98</sup> "Si gloriari oportet (non expedit quidem), veniam autem ad visiones et revelationes Domini. Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim (sive in corpore, nescio, sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit), raptum huiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum. Et scio huiusmodi hominem (sive in corpore, sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit) quoniam raptus est in Paradisum, et audivit arcana verba, quae non licet homini loqui. Pro huiusmodi gloriabor; pro me autem nihil gloriabor nisi in infirmitatibus meis. Nam, et si voluero gloriari, non ero insipiens, veritatem enim dicam; parco autem, ne quis me existimet supra id quod videt in me, aut aliquid audit ex me. Et ne magnitudo revelationum extoliat me, datus est mihi stimulus carnis meae, angelus Satanae, qui me colaphizet. Propter quod ter Dominum rogavi, ut discederet a me; nam virtus in infirmitate perficitur. Libenter igitur gloriabor in infirmitatibus meis, ut inhabitet in me virtus Christi. Propter quod placeo mihi in infirmitatibus meis, in contumeliis, in necessitatibus, in persecutionibus, in angustiis pro Christo; cum enim infirmor, tunc potens sum." I have given the translation from the *Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, 2nd ed..

<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* 7.17.23 (CCSL 27:107): "... et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo carnalis." *Conf.* 17.18.24 (CCSL 27:108): "Et quaerebam viam comparandi roboris, quod esset idoneum ad fruendum te, nec inveniebam, donec amplecterer mediatorem dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum .... Non enim tenebam deum meum Iesum humilis humilem, nec cuius rei magistra esset eius infirmitas noveram .... ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur videntes ante pedes suos infirmam divinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae (Gen. 3.21) et lassii prosternerentur in eam, illa autem surgens levaret eos." Trans. Chadwick, 127.

holy. So to forget yourself, that you do not exist, and be totally unconscious of yourself, to become nothing, is not a human feeling it is a divine experience. If any person manages this, even if it is only for a moment, the wicked world will envy him, the evil of the day will bother him, his human body with all its needs will weigh him down, and the weakness of his corrupted nature cannot be overcome. Yet with greater strength brotherly love calls him back. He is forced to return to himself, to look into himself and humbly cry out, "I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" (Is. 38.14) "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7.24)<sup>100</sup>

Augustine's "crashing back to inferior things" and being "weighed down by sexuality" (Paul's thorn) is Bernard's "his human body with all of its needs will weigh him down" and the "weakness of his corrupted nature that *cannot* be overcome." Augustine says that through this experience a man learns not to put confidence in himself (Paul's "grace is sufficient"), but to become weak. This lack of confidence is expressed by Bernard's pleas and his crying out to the Lord's aid. Augustine invokes grace as that which "rises and lifts" people out of their weakness. As we have seen, this refers to his way of surrendering to the "weight of love" and submitting to desire. Bernard invokes an idea of being saved by brotherly love: "With greater strength brotherly love calls him back!" After he implores "who will rescue me from this body of death?" he reminds himself that "the Lord works out everything for his own ends" (Prov. 16.4).<sup>101</sup> Augustine's path, too, is "mysterious."<sup>102</sup>

Bernard has invoked the experience of the third heaven (in the same indirect terms as Paul's "I know a man ..."), then, like Augustine, he comes crashing back to a weakness "that cannot be overcome," then he implores God for aid, invokes brotherly love, and escalates this crisis as being a matter of life and

<sup>100</sup> *De dil.* 10.27 (SBO 3: 142): "Felix qui meruit ad quartum usque pertingere .... Caro et sanguis, vas luteum, terrena inhabitatio quando capit hoc? Quando huiuscemodi experitur affectum, ut divino debriatus amore animus, oblitus sui .... Beatum dixerim et sanctum, cui tale aliquid in hac mortali vita raro interdum, aut vel semel, et hoc ipsum raptim atque unius vix momenti spatio, experiri donatum est. Te enim quodammodo perdere, tamquam qui non sis, et omnino non sentire teipsum, et a temetipso exinaniri, et paene annullari, caelestis est conversationis, non humanae affectionis. Et si quidem e mortalibus quispiam ad illud raptim interdum, ut dictum est, et ad momentum admittitur, subito invidet saeculum nequam, perturbat diei malitia, corpus mortis aggravat, sollicitat carnis necessitas, defectus corruptionis non sustinet, quodque his violentius est, fraterna revocat caritas. Heu! Redire in se, recidere in sua compellitur, et miserabiliter exclamare: 'Domine, vix patior; responde pro me' (Is. 38.14), et illud: 'Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius?'" (Rom. 7.24) Trans. in Backhouse, 107-108.

<sup>101</sup> This is the sentence immediately following, *De dil.* 10.28 (SBO 3:143): "Quoniam tamen Scriptura loquitur, Deum omnia fecisse propter semetipsum ..." (Prov. 16.4).

death — “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” We have the classic Bernardine juxtaposition of the ideal — to forget yourself in the experience of divinity — and the reality of human weakness. We also have the reminder that this is how it is meant to be — “the Lord works everything out” — and the suggestion of a reconciliation in the “greater strength” of fraternal love.

Turning this scene into a confrontation with death in the words of Romans underlines the relationship between Bernard’s mysticism and his engagement with Paul. In what comes next, Bernard shifts the terms away from the third-heaven/weakness experience to what is really at stake in his mysticism, namely, the moral liberation of the will, the real thing that overcomes death (law) in Pauline philosophy. Our passage continues thus:

The day must surely come when God’s creatures will conform and harmonise themselves with their maker. Our souls will become like this, uniting in God’s plans for everything to exist for him, so that we desire ourselves and other people to live for God alone and not for our own pleasure. Our own happiness or satisfaction is laid aside in preference for his will to be done in our lives .... How holy and pure, how sweet and tenderhearted love is! O how pure and true the intention of the will which becomes more clear and true the more nothing of one’s own self remains; the more sweet and delightful it becomes the more it feels something totally divine. To feel this is to become god-like.<sup>103</sup>

Divinisation is about harmonising the soul with its maker. More important than an ideal of ascension to God through third-heaven revelations, divinisation is essentially about freeing the self through this harmony. Bernard describes the achievement of divinisation as pure in its “sweetness.” As we have seen, Bernard’s “own philosophy,” “one more refined and interior,” is “to know Jesus and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2) and to hold him *sweetly* — not sublimely — between his breasts.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:435), quoted above p. 45 n. 82.

<sup>103</sup> *De dil.* 10.28 (SBO 3:143): “Oportet proinde in eundem nos affectum quandocumque transire, et quomodo Deus omnia esse voluit propter semetipsum, sic nos quoque nec nosipsos, nec aliud aliquid fuisse vel esse velimus, nisi aeque propter ipsum, ob solam ipsius videlicet voluntatem, non nostram voluptatem. Delectabit sane non tam nostra vel sopita necessitas, vel sortita felicitas, quam quod eius in nobis et de nobis voluntas adimpleta videbitur .... O amor sanctus et castus! O dulcis et suavis affectio! O pura et defaecata intentio voluntatis, eo certe defaecatior et purior, quo in ea de proprio nil iam admixtum relinquatur, eo suavior et dulcior, quo totum divinum est quod sentitur! Sic affici deificari est.” Trans. in Backhouse, 108 and mine.

<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere he describes humility as a “sublime virtue”; *SC* 85.4.14 (SBO 2:316).

Perhaps in fixing upon the question of how the renunciations of ascension to divinity in Pauline tradition exclude and curtail a certain kind of spirituality, we blind ourselves to the spirituality they *allow*. Rather than the “magnification of the distance between God and humanity” implied in the idea of man being unable to get to where God is,<sup>105</sup> we could read these models as suggesting that the location of “divinity” is not much further away from humanity, but much, much closer to us. Paul was reluctant to bear witness to Christ through the knowledge gained in the third heaven where one “hears things that cannot be told and which man cannot utter.” Instead of encouraging people to “think more of me than they see and hear from me,” Paul says that he refrains from boasting of revelation but that he is glad to boast of his weakness and thus reveal the power of Christ (“that the power of Christ may rest upon me”).

Elsewhere, Paul talks about how harmony is brought to society because of its weakest member. The “inferior part” of the social body was given the “greatest honour” by God so that there should be “no discord in the body” but so that “all members should have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured all rejoice together” (1 Cor. 12.24-26). In the *Phaedo*, Socrates rejects the idea of psychosomatic unity presented in Simmias’ metaphor of body and soul working harmonically together just like an instrument and its melody.<sup>106</sup> Instead, Socrates prefers the model of the mind’s absolute rulership over the body and the emotions because it reflects the immutability proper to an Eternal, unborn Essence. To emphasise his difference from Platonists and his closeness to Paul, Augustine likes to refer to the Christian social ideal of Christ’s “harmonising” with humanity.<sup>107</sup> Bernard describes Christ’s descent to suffering as bringing him into “harmony with our condition.”<sup>108</sup> And Bernard views this harmonising as a liberation. Christ, he says, became a sufferer with sufferers (com-passionate) not to join them in their

<sup>105</sup> This common view of Augustinian theology is exemplified by Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: From Abraham to the Present: The 4000-Year Quest for God* (London: Arrow, 1993), 127-128, 143.

<sup>106</sup> For Simmias’ metaphor see Plato, *Phaedo* 86a-d; for the whole discussion see *Phaedo*, 86-95.

<sup>107</sup> E.g., *De trin.* 8.9.13 (CCSL 50:290): “... cum in carne uiueret huic formae coaptatam et congruentem fuisse.” And see Augustine’s important discussion of Christ’s harmonising with humanity; *De trin.* book four, especially 4.3.5-6 (CCSL 50:165-69). Brown views the “yearning for harmony” as a sustaining feature of Augustine’s theology; *Body and Society*, 405-407.

<sup>108</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.12 (SBO 3:25): “... nobis haec magis congrua fuit.”

suffering, but to liberate them from suffering!<sup>109</sup> This “liberation from suffering” does not, however, mean the avoidance or divine transcendence of suffering. The latter is a condition attained only after death.<sup>110</sup> Instead, it means the attainment of moral freedom even within the condition of law by “the restoration of honour” to the weakest member of the social body for the sake of harmony.

In his wonderful eighth book of *On the Trinity* Augustine demonstrates that the unique nature of charity is its necessary relativity. Charity is not found in itself, instead charity only *finds itself in others*.

What then does charity love that makes it possible for charity herself also to be loved? She is not charity if she loves nothing; but if she loves herself, she must love something in order to love herself as charity .... unless it loves itself loving something, it does not love itself as charity.<sup>111</sup>

More directly, Augustine teaches, simply, that you must be in love to love God.<sup>112</sup> Continuing, he asks: so what is it that charity loves? Augustine’s answer is crucial to Bernard. Charity loves “our brother.” “Whoever, you see, does not love his brother (1 Joan. 4.20) is not in love, and whoever is not in love is not in God, because ‘God is love’” (1 Joan. 4.8).<sup>113</sup>

Bernard expresses a wish that an angel would strike his thigh, as he did King David, so that “instead of letting my own strength hurry me to my inevitable ruin, by this affliction I might begin to advance.”<sup>114</sup> “Nature can never shake off this evil of its own strength ... but what nature cannot do, grace can.”<sup>115</sup> By

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.: “Non ut miser cum miseris remaneret, sed ut misericors factus miseris liberaret!” Leclercq points out Bernard’s frequent use of the biblical wordplay between *miser* and *misericordia*; Leclercq, introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 36. Bernard also makes a similar wordplay with *patio* and *compatior* e.g., *De gradibus* 1.3.9 (SBO 3:23): “... et in eo quo passus est ipse, nobis compati posse non dubitamus.”

<sup>110</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 3.6 (SBO 3:170).

<sup>111</sup> *De trin.* 8.8.12 (CCSL 50:287): “Ergo quid diligit caritas ut possit etiam ipsa caritas diligi? Caritas enim non est quae nihil diligit. Si autem se ipsam diligit, diligit aliquid oportet ut caritate se diligit .... sed nisi se aliquid diligentem diligit non caritate se diligit.” Trans. Hill, 253.

<sup>112</sup> *De trin.* 8.8.12 (CCSL 50:288): “... et qui non est in dilectione non est in deo.”

<sup>113</sup> *De trin.* 8.8.12 (CCSL 50:287-88): “Quid ergo diligit caritas nisi quod caritate diligimus? Id autem ut a proximo prouehamur frater est .... ‘Qui enim non diligit fratrem’ (1 Joan. 4.20) non est in dilectione, et qui non est in dilectione non est in deo, ‘quia deus dilectio est’” (1 Joan. 4.8).

<sup>114</sup> *De gradibus* 1.9.25. (SBO 3:35): “Utinam et meum nervum Angelus tangat ut marcescat, si forte ex hac infirmitate incipiam proficere, qui ex mea firmitate non possum nisi deficere.” He goes on to cite 2 Cor. 12.9: “... nam virtus in infirmitate perficitur.”

<sup>115</sup> *SC* 44.4.6 (SBO 2:48): “A quo male minime per se .... natura resurget .... Verumtamen quod non potest natura, potest gratia.” Trans. Walsh and Edmonds, *Song*, 3:229.

myself, I can do nothing, Bernard says, literally nothing.<sup>116</sup> All of these statements reflect the fact that one cannot be in love on one's own. To enter into a new social harmony based on loving relations one cannot be self-sufficient. *There is no realisation of love outside of loving relations.*

Compassion not only exemplifies the "only kind of love possible" within the human condition of shared misery. It also expresses a truth about the nature of love *per se*. Bernard describes compassion as uniting "people so closely that they feel their neighbour's good and ill as if it were their own."<sup>117</sup> Thus, compassion fulfils the Christian task of moral liberation because it overcomes the conflict of the will that makes law necessary, bringing wills into harmony: "They feel their neighbour's good and ill as if it were their own." Bernard goes on to describe how, through compassion, "*their hearts are made clear-sighted by love and they experience the delight of contemplating truth in itself.*"<sup>118</sup> Compassion thus expresses the highest form of divine love in which "truth is known in itself." In compassion, one experiences a painful/punishing realisation of one's unfulfilled, desirous nature by seeing the truth about oneself reflected in another. In this same moment, however — a moment of unification with another — that very lack of fulfilment is fulfilled. Divine love, too, embraces both incompleteness and completion. "Charity is not charity if she loves nothing," Augustine taught, "but if she loves herself, she must love something in order to love herself as charity."

<sup>116</sup> SC 3.3 (SBO 1:16): "Vae enim mihi etiam paenitenti, si statim subtraxerit manum, sine quo nihil possum facere (Joan. 15.5). Nihil inquam, quia nec paenitere, nec continere."

<sup>117</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.6 (SBO 3:20): "Misericordes quippe cito in proximis veritatem deprehendunt, dum suos affectus in illos extendunt, dum sic per caritatem se illis conformant, ut illorum vel bona, vel mala, tamquam propria sentiant."

<sup>118</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.6 (SBO 3:20-21): "Hac caritate fraterna cordis acie mundata, veritatem delectantur in sui contemplari natura, [pro cuius amore mala tolerant aliena]." Translated in Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 5, *Treatises II*, trans. Robert Walton, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 13 (Washington D.C.: Cistercian Publications, Consortium, 1974), 35. Bernard also interestingly compares *misericordia* with contemplation, *ibid.*: "Sicut enim pura veritas non nisi puro corde videtur, sic miseria fratris verius misero corde sentitur." These passages compare nicely with *De dil.* 10.28 (SBO 3:143), and with Augustine, *De doct. Christ.* 1.22.21 (CCSL 32:18): "Quisquis ergo recte diligit proximum, hoc cum eo debet agere, ut etiam ipse toto corde, tota anima, tota mente diligat deum. Sic enim eum diligens tamquam se ipsum totam dilectionem sui et illius refert in illam dilectionem dei ...." [So a person who loves his neighbour properly should, in concert with him, aim to love God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind. In this way, loving him as he would himself, he relates his love of himself and his neighbour entirely to the love of God.] Translated in Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 31. Indeed, Augustine's whole discussion here, on how to turn self-love into love of God, or at least of one's neighbour (*De doct. Christ.* book one 22.21 onwards), compares interestingly with Bernard's *De dil.*

Is charity/compassion divine because it reflects something inherent to the unearthly Trinity, or is, instead, the very humane achievement of moral good through compassion celebrated by calling it divine? “Do you not see, my brothers, that even Majesty yields to love?”<sup>119</sup> Bernard rejoices. “Love neither looks up to nor looks down on anybody. It regards as equal all who love each other truly, bringing together in itself the lofty and the lowly. Perhaps up till now you have thought God should be an exception to this law of love?”<sup>120</sup> Not only should our ideals of God not be exempt from this law of harmonious love but, on the contrary, our ideals of what the new Christian God *is* should be based on this ideal of love.

Bernard interprets our divinising compassionate tears as the equivalent of the moment in which divinity was pierced “for us,” that is, humanised, on the cross.<sup>121</sup> In Christ’s piercing all of his divine independence poured out of him, draining him and filling him with the emptiness of human need and passion. Bernard teaches that God’s work of piety began by His knowledge of mercy in eternity and was *perfected* by his mediation of misery amongst humanity.<sup>122</sup> “In his divine nature, Christ had no way to grow or ascend, because there is nothing beyond God. Yet *he found a way to grow by descending*, coming to be incarnated, to suffer and to die.”<sup>123</sup> Emotions are the opposite of divine self-sufficiency, they are a testament to incompleteness; they are the weakness of one’s responsiveness to another. Dependent on another and beyond one’s control they are the “punishment” that has pierced the impenetrable soul. Majesty yields to love.

<sup>119</sup> SC 59.1.2 (SBO 2:136): “Vides amori cedere etiam maiestatem?”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., “Ita est, fratres: neminem suspicit amor, sed ne despicit quidem. Omnes ex aequo intuetur, qui perfecte se amant et in seipso celsos humilesque temperat.... Tu Deum forsitan adhuc ab hac amoris regula excipi putas; [sed qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est {1 Cor. 6.17}].” Trans. Walsh and Edmonds, *Song*, 3:121. As we will see in the next chapter, Origen teaches that God the Father feels the suffering of love, see *Homily on Ezekiel* 6.6 in von Balthasar, *Origen*, 122. On the “law of love” see also *De dil.* 14.37 (SBO 3:151).

<sup>121</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo super psalmum ‘Qui habitat’* 11.9 (SBO 4:454-55), for Latin see above p. 100 n. 90.

<sup>122</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.12 (SBO 3:25): “Factus, inquam, misericors, non illa misericordia, quam felix manens habuit ab aeterno, sed quam mediante miseria reperit in habitu nostro. Porro pietatis opus, quod per illam coepit, in ista perfecit ....” These comments occur in context of Bernard’s discussion of how God can know of compassion experientially, since He has never experienced suffering. On the Eternal God’s necessary exemption from compassion see: Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 8 (SAO 1:106); Augustine, *Conf.* 3.2.3 (CCSL 27:28).

<sup>123</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in ascensione domini* 2.6 (SBO 5:130): “Christus enim cum per naturam divinitatis non haberet quo cresceret vel ascenderet, quia ultra Deum nihil est, per descensum quomodo cresceret invenit, veniens incarnari, pati, mori ....” Trans. Kienzle, 36.

Christ descended in order to grow. Bernard's spirituality is not one in which humanity learns to emulate a divine way of loving, but one in which divinity learns to emulate a human way of loving.

Christ's weakness is also his power because, through compassionate love, the Good of social harmony is born. A sigh "too deep for words" (Rom. 8.26) echoes through the creation for the sake of the common good.<sup>124</sup> Life is caught up in a net of charity which is dragged "across the broad and mighty ocean of time." *Caritas*, caring, is the web through time and place that connects our fragmented world.

All kinds of fish are caught in charity's net, where, for the time being, it conforms to all (1 Cor. 9.19), drawing to itself the adversity and prosperity of all. In a way it makes them its own, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, as is its habit (Rom. 12.15).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *SC* 59.3.6 (SBO 2:138): "Forte Apostolus id solvit, ubi ait quia 'ipse Spiritus postulat pro sanctis, gemitibus inenarrabilibus' (Rom. 8.26). Ita est: ipse inducitur gemens, qui gementes facit. Et quamlibet multi sint, quos ita gemere audias, unius per omnium labia vox sonat. Quidni illius, qui ipsam in ore singulorum pro quorumque necessitatibus format? Denique 'unicuique datur manifestatio spiritus ad utilitatem'" (1 Cor. 12.7).

<sup>125</sup> *De dil.* 15.40 (SBO 3:153-54): "Tunc sagena caritatis, quae nunc tracta per hoc mare magnum et spatiosum ex omni genere piscium congregare non desinit .... Siquidem in hac vita ex omni genere piscium intra sinum suae latitudinis caritatis rete concludit, ubi se pro tempore omnibus conformans omniumque in se sive adversa, sive prospera traiciens, ac sua quodammodo faciens, non solum gaudere cum gaudentibus, sed etiam flere cum flentibus consuevit" (Rom. 12.15). Trans. Walton, 132. Cf., Origen, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 10.2: "This net is cast into the sea, the tumultuous life of human beings who, everywhere in the world, swim in the bitter affairs of life." Trans. Daly/von Balthasar, *Origen*, 95.

*Mother of the Word and the "Life of Mary  
Magdalene"*

And I, brothers, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but only as fleshly; I gave you, like babies in Christ, milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet capable of it, indeed you are not capable of it now.

1 Corinthians 3.1-2

*The Mirror and the Light*

William of St-Thierry contrasts the weakness and dependency of naked, animal man, who is born of a "wicked stepmother" and deformed by original sin, with the "erect man of reason," whose untarnished gaze is directed at the stars.<sup>1</sup> Another influential twelfth-century spiritual teacher, Richard of St-Victor, divides the lower human faculties, which are born of a woman, from the highest level of mystical contemplation which is "self-born." Unlike all of the natural faculties in human beings born into the world by a mother, when contemplation is born, human reason has *already* died in labour and "the mind births contemplation of itself."<sup>2</sup> Only in the highest level of contemplation does the soul "recover its

<sup>1</sup> William of St-Thierry, *De natura corporis et animae* 2 (PL 180:714, 715).

<sup>2</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De duodecim patriarchis* 72 (PL 196:52): "Mens itaque, quae iam visionis huius desiderio flagrat, si iam sperat, quod desiderat, jam se Benjamin concepisse cognoscat." There are two types of birth of contemplation, *De duodecim patriarchis* 86 (PL 196:62): "In primo Benjamin interficit matrem, ubi omnem supergreditur rationem; in secundo autem etiam seipsum excedit, ubi in eo ... humanae intelligentiae modum transcendit." For more on the death of the mother in Benjamin's first birth, see below p. 164 n. 115.

ancient dignity," and claim for itself the "unborn honour of its own freedom."<sup>3</sup> Richard's writings abound with the optimism that human beings are capable of finding joy, freedom and independence in contemplation. Through contemplation the inner person can be raised up to an unrestraint he imagines as dance-like. Forgetfulness, inebriation and alienation are all concepts he uses to describe this freedom of mind. Beyond sensation, the imaging of bodily forms, and surpassing the ins and outs and proofs of human reasoning, contemplation soars to a brilliance blinding to all other mental faculties. Sublime truth is secretive and hidden. Like radiation it is revealed momentarily to expose the transparency of matter, then forgotten like a dream. Tears are inimical to the upper levels of the mind, where the mystic dances free of earthly passions.<sup>4</sup>

Contemplative knowledge is direct and unmediated. Unborn, it is not "delivered" by signs, it relies on no material substance, no manifestation for its conveyance. Most importantly, contemplative awareness *suffers* no duality. The unified Word is not divided into many because there is no variation of words in the united Word, Hugh of St-Victor teaches.<sup>5</sup> In the mysterious unity of the Trinity, there is no essential difference between signifier (Son) and signified (Father) and no substantial distinction between knower and the object of knowledge. Bernard of Clairvaux recites convention when he describes a perfect knowledge as one in which knower and known are one.<sup>6</sup> Bernard longs to "die the death of angels," transcending the memory of things present, casting off all desire for corporeal things and even the images of those things so that he may "enjoy pure conversation with those who bear the likeness of purity .... To gaze without the use of bodily likenesses is the sign of angelic purity."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De arca mystica (Benjamin major)* 2.13 (PL 196:91): "Hic primum, animus antiquam dignitatem recuperat, et ingenitum propriae libertatis honorem sibi vindicat."

<sup>4</sup> For Richard, when the soul weeps it is in a lower and sensual state inimical to the upper levels of the mind dominated by reason and finally by supra-rational pure contemplation; *De duodecim patriarchis* 4 (PL 196:4); quoted in full below p. 163 n. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De verbo Dei* 1.3 in Hugues de Saint-Victor, *Six Opuscules Spirituels*, ed. Roger Baron, SC 155 (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 62: "Quia sicut in multis unum verbum non dividitur, ita multa in uno verbo non variantur."

<sup>6</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 82.3.8 (SBO 2:298): "Tunc cognosceat anima sicut cognita est; tunc amabit sicut amata est; et gaudebit sponsus super sponsam, cognoscens et cognitus, diligens et dilectus ...."

<sup>7</sup> SC 52.2.5 (SBO 2:92): "Sed moriatur anima mea morte etiam, si dici potest, angelorum, ut praesentium memoria excedens, rerum se inferiorum corporearumque non modo cupiditatibus, sed

From its inception in Greek philosophy, the epistemological ideal of perfect self-sameness has always been associated with absolute freedom, true existence, emotional satiation and lack of suffering and disturbance. Like a child that never emerged from the womb, neither separation nor life belong to perfect knowledge. Augustine describes how, before it was born into the world, the Eternal Word suffered no diminution “but remained self-contained and at home in itself.”<sup>8</sup> When the Word is whole and contained, as if in the womb, it suffers neither disturbance nor pain. The incarnate God, the Word made flesh (Joan. 1.14), however, is epitomised by a painful existence. As a human being, God is born into the world and, like all other babies, the God-child cries. The thirteenth-century Beguine mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg, reflects tenderly on how: “He wept for all humankind, hiding all his happiness and all his power. The Virgin was sad and the child was hungry and cold.”<sup>9</sup> As the epitome of his human feeling, Christ’s tears represent his communication with humanity.

Straddling the contemplative heights and the first cry of a baby born of a wicked stepmother is the cross. Origen describes the cross as the breadth and width, the height and the depth (Eph. 4.8-9) of “all the earth” (Ps. 18.5).<sup>10</sup> The whole world is on the cusp between flesh and spirit. Augustine teaches that Christ is everywhere, even in hell.<sup>11</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux describes Christ’s mercy as greater than the distance between heaven and earth.<sup>12</sup> He also has the insight, as we have seen, that the unification of souls that graces even the love between two

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et similitudinibus exuat, sitque ei pura cum illis conversatio, in quibus est puritatis similitudo.” Trans. Walsh and Edmonds, *Song*, 3:53.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *De doct. Christ.* 1.12.13 (CCSL 32:13): “[uerbum] apud se manens integra ... sine aliqua labe suae mutationis ...”

<sup>9</sup> Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit* 5.23; in P. Gall Morel ed., *Offenbarung der Schwester Mechtild von Magdeburg oder Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 149:

“Do wenete er alles menschlich kuene,  
Do verbarg er alle sine wuene und allen sinen gewalt.  
Do wart du jungfröwe betrübet

Und de kint wart hungerig und kalt.” Translated in Mechtild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1995), 199.

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Ephesians* fragment, trans. Daly/von Balthasar, *Origen*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> *De trin.* 2.5.7 (CCSL 50:89).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in ascensione Domini* 2.5 (SBO 5:129): “... maiores cumulos miserationum Domini sentiant, quam sit spatii inter caelum et terram.”

brothers in misery (and what other love could there be between human beings?) is a glimpse of perfection. *Compassion can be contemplated.*

Augustine rebukes Pelagius' contemplative path because it "renders the cross void" (1 Cor. 1.17).<sup>13</sup> "The Word made flesh" implies a different epistemology from that of traditional contemplation — one in which, as Augustine puts it, "Human beings learn from human beings."<sup>14</sup> Instead of craning our necks above ourselves to view the Eternal Word, we find the Word in its outflowing, as it illuminates the material world and as we teach one another. Both Origen and Augustine saw the "Word made flesh" as the essential difference between Christianity and Platonism. Christ's humble teaching delivered the Word to women and children, not just to philosophers.<sup>15</sup>

The alternative morality of *caritas* is also an alternative epistemology. In this chapter, we will look at how the way of *caritas* translates into an alternative way of knowing — a way which emphasises the human location of learning, communicating and understanding. The anonymous twelfth-century Cistercian *Life of Mary Magdalene* that will be the focus of my interpretation in this chapter creatively explores the theme of incarnate, loving communication through its characterisation of Magdalene as a preacher and a "mother to the word." The imagery and the philosophy behind the idea of Christ as a maternal communicator belongs to a long and rich tradition that goes back to Origen's interpretation of biblical themes. Thus, before we come to our interpretation of Magdalene's *Life*, we will briefly look at how the tradition of interpreting the preacher as a mother develops from Origen to Augustine and Gregory the Great and is thence picked up by Bernard of Clairvaux and other twelfth-century interpreters. Under the metaphors of "mirror" and "light," this discussion — which we have already begun — is framed by a polemic comparison between the different modes of knowing represented by contemplation and compassion.

The movement towards spiritual perfection is not necessarily an upward progression. Ephesians 4.9 teaches that: "You cannot ascend unless you

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 9.10 (PL 44:252): "Si potuisse dicunt; ecce quod est, crucem Christi evacuare ... Dicamus et hic, 'Ergo Christus gratis mortuus est'" (1 Cor. 1.17).

<sup>14</sup> *De doct. Christ.* prooemium 6 (CCSL 32:4) cited below p. 116 n. 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Conf.* 7.9.14 (CCSL 27:101); Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.42 (PG 11:1481).

descend."<sup>16</sup> Just as Origen finds Christ's birth more marvellous than his death,<sup>17</sup> so in one profound area of his thought he reverses the significance of the cross as a vehicle for spiritual departure and turns it into the means of spiritual entry to the world. It was "necessary for Christ to be struck" during his crucifixion and for "water and blood to flow from his side" (Joan. 19.34).<sup>18</sup> Rather than spiritually transcending the world, the piercing of Christ's body on the cross engenders a fertile outpouring of the Word into the world. Origen associates Christ's suffering with his descent and his *visibility*: "First he suffered, then descended and became visible." His suffering, descent and self-emptying are Christ's communication: "If he had not suffered he would not have been made conversant with human life."<sup>19</sup> The suffering birth, through which the Word entered into conversation with life, was also an act of love: "What is this suffering which he suffered for us? It is the suffering of love (*caritas*)."<sup>20</sup> Christ's piercing on the cross represents his penetration and insemination with desire. In his desire for another he flows out of himself, emptying himself to enter into a fulfilling embrace with the whole world. "What came into this life emptied itself, so that through its emptiness the world would be fulfilled."<sup>21</sup> Christ's communication with humanity is motivated by desire and leads to loving union.

Through exegesis, Origen shows that Christ's piercing is not a singular event but represents the birth of desire for love in humanity. Origen equates the spear that stabbed Christ-crucified with the "chosen dart" that penetrates the soul as the Bride of God (Is. 49.2) and with the piercing of the Virgin Mary as foretold in Simeon's prophesy. In Luke 2.53 Simeon tells Mary: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also."<sup>22</sup> Christianising passages from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Origen teaches that:

<sup>16</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in ascensione Domini* 2.6 (SBO 5:130).

<sup>17</sup> Origen, *Homily on Ezekiel* 1.4; in von Balthasar, *Origen*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Origen, *Commentaria in Evangelium Joannis* 1.176; trans. Heine, 1:69; Origen, *Homily on Exodus* 11.2; trans. Daly/von Balthasar, *Origen*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 6.6 (PG 13:714): "Si enim non fuisset passus, non venisset in conversationem humanae vitae. Primum passus est, deinde descendit, et visus est."

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, "Quae est ista quam pro nobis passus est passio? Caritas est passio."

<sup>21</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Jeremiam* 8.8 (PG 13:346): "... quoniam hoc quod descendit in mundum, evacuavit seipsum, ut evacuatione eius mundus compleretur."

<sup>22</sup> On the chosen dart, Origen, *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum* Prol. 12 (PG 13:67); Origen, *In Lucam homilia* 17 (PG 13:1845): "... et tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius:" cited in Sticco, *Planctus Mariae*, 33.

If ... a man can so extend his thinking as to ponder and consider the beauty and the grace of all the things that have been created in the Word, the very charm of them will so smite him, the grandeur of their brightness will so pierce him as with "a chosen dart," as says the prophet (Is. 49.2), that he will suffer from the Word Himself a saving wound, and will be kindled with the blessed fire of His love.<sup>23</sup>

The "saving wound" or the "wound of love" (*vulnus amoris*) is an inseminating desire sown spiritually in the inner man. Where one person may be childless and barren in the inner man, another will have "plenty of offspring."<sup>24</sup> The saving wound of the birth of the Word engenders a fertile overflowing; it is not something a man keeps to himself but, as the birth of desire for unification, is something that drives a man out of himself, fertilising the world with a spiritual overflowing.

Augustine reveals his familiarity with this Origenist teaching when, in his *Confessions*, he describes how: "You shot an arrow of Your love into our heart and Your Word was born in our wombs."<sup>25</sup> Since the birth of the Word is an essentially communicative act, Augustine translates Origen's doctrine into the prosaic realm of preaching. Rather than the contemplative arena implicit in Origen's version ("if a man can extend his thinking ..."), for Augustine "the love that flowed into us" (Rom. 5.5) is exemplified in a preacher's impregnation and

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Canticum canticorum* Prol. 12 (PG 13:67): "Amore autem et cupidine coelesti agitur anima cum perspecta pulchritudine et decore verbi Dei, speciem eius adamaverit, et ex ipso telum quoddam et vulnus amoris acceperit. Et enim verbum hoc imago, et splendor Dei invisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae, in quo creata sunt omnia quae in coelis sunt, et quae in terris, sive visibilia, sive invisibilia. Igitur si quis potuerit capaci mente conijcere et considerare horum omnium quae in ipso creata sunt decus et speciem, ipsa rerum venustate percussus, et splendoris magnificentia ceu iaculo, ut ait propheta, electo terebratus, salutare ab ipso vulnus accipiet, et beato igne amoris eius ardebit." Translated by R. P. Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs. Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 26 (Westminster: Newman, 1956), 29. On the soul's falling in love with beauty see Plato, *Phaedrus* 249d-249e; on the "pang of philosophy" see *Phaedrus* 218a-218b; and on the philosopher's insemination with desire for wisdom see *Phaedrus* 209a-209d. I thank Angus Nichols for drawing my attention to these remarkable passages of Plato. For a summary and discussion of recent scholarly interest and debate on the significance of desire in Plato see McGinn, *Presence of God*, 1:26-29.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, "... est quidem secundum interiorem hominem alius sine filiis sterilis, alius vero abundans in filiis .... Igitur si haec ita se habent, sicut dicitur aliquis carnalis amor, quem et cupidinem appellaverunt poetae, secundum quem qui amat, in carne seminat; ita est et quidem spiritalis amor, secundum quem ille interior homo amans in spiritu seminat." Trans. Lawson, 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Conf.* 9.2.3 (CCSL 27:134): "Sagittaueras tu cor nostrum caritate tua, et gestabamus uerba tua transfixa uisceribus." So far as I am aware, Augustine shies away from the overtly Platonist notion in the Origenist doctrine, namely that the soul is "smitten by beauty." This kind of aesthetic pursuit of wisdom may smack of elitism to him. Christ, after all, did not love us for our beauty, but loved us "while we were still sinners" (Rom. 5.8); *De trin.* 4.1.2 (CCSL 50:161).

delivery of the Word. Augustine, that great writer, made communication itself into a love-act.<sup>26</sup>

Without human beings learning from human beings, "There would be no way for love, which ties people together in the bonds of unity, to make souls overflow and, as it were, intermingle with one another."<sup>27</sup> Augustine's descriptions of the spiritual insemination and birth of the Word in the preacher's heart, and the repetition of this process when the preacher's words penetrate the hearts of his listeners, is a version of the Origenist doctrine of the saving and impregnating wound. "Before [the preacher] opens his thrusting lips, he should lift up his thirsting soul to God so that he may utter what he has drunk and pour out what has filled him."<sup>28</sup> "When we speak, the Word that is born in our mind becomes a sound in order that what was borne in our heart may penetrate the ears of the flesh into the listener's mind."<sup>29</sup> The allusion to Origen's birth of the Word was not lost on Gregory the Great, who brings Augustine's expression more closely to its Origenist roots by describing the "great pains and struggles" in which preachers "give birth to souls in faith and conversion."<sup>30</sup> Gregory likens bad words in the mouth of a preacher to "misspent seed."<sup>31</sup> Emphasising the

<sup>26</sup> Although not in the same sense that I mean it here, Margaret Miles also views Augustine's prolificness as a love-act. "In Augustine's physical and spiritual universe the hoarding of seminal fluid became the practice and paradigm of an integrated life." In Augustine, this was "productive not least in the seminal writings that flowed from his pen"; *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's "Confessions"* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 98.

<sup>27</sup> *De doct. Christ.* prooemium 6 (CCSL 32:4): "Deinde ipsa caritas, quae sibi homines inuicem nodo unitatis adstringit, non haberet aditum refundendorum et quasi miscendorum sibimet animorum, si homines per homines nihil discerent." Two excellent essays on *caritas* in *De doct. Christ.* are: R. A. Markus, "Signs, Communication and Communities in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*," and David Dawson, "Sign Theory, Allegorical Reading and the Motions of the Soul in *De doctrina Christiana*," in "*De doctrina Christiana*": A Classic of Western Culture, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, 97-108; 123-141 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> *De doct. Christ.* 4.15.32 (CCSL 32:138): "Ipsa hora iam ut dicat accedens, priusquam exerat profertentem linguam, ad deum leuet animam sitieterem, ut ructet quod biberit, vel quod impleuerit fundat."

<sup>29</sup> *De doct. Christ.* 1.12.13 (CCSL 32:13): "[Quomodo uenit, nisi quod uerbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis? (Joan. 1.14)] Sicuti cum loquimur, ut id, quod animo gerimus, in audientis animum per aures carneas inlabatur, fit sonus uerbum quod corde gestamus, et locutio uocatur ...." Cf. Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.4 (PL 77:30): "In mente quippe audientium semen secuturae cogitationis est auditae qualitas locutionis, quia dum per aurem sermo concipitur, cogitatio in mente generatur."

<sup>30</sup> *Regula pastoralis* 2.4 (PL 77:31): "... quantis doloribus, quasi quibusdam conatibus animas in fide et conversatione parturiunt."

<sup>31</sup> *Regula pastoralis* 2.4 (PL 77:30) "... non ad usum generis, sed ad immunditiam semen effundit."

piercing of the "chosen dart," a preacher's words are "thorns" to pierce the listener's heart and as tears flow from their eyes it is like "the blood of the soul."<sup>32</sup>

Parallelling the descent of the Eternal Word in the Incarnation of Christ, Augustine teaches that we can discern in even ordinary human speech a similar descent for the purposes of loving union.

There is a Word which we utter in the heart, a Word that is neither Greek nor Latin nor any other language ... [and] our Word becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it is manifested to the senses of man, just as the Word of God became flesh by assuming that by which it too could be manifested to the senses of men.<sup>33</sup>

When the Word is made flesh it enters into the physical forms of signs, images, sounds, words, voice and gesture. ("What after all is gesticulating but a way of speaking visibly?")<sup>34</sup> The Word flows into the world in speaking, but it is not trapped there. The Word becomes flesh, but it is not turned into flesh — as Augustine puts it, "It assumes but is not consumed by flesh."<sup>35</sup> For language to become more than babble, it must be understood.

The process of birth, separation, outflowing and, eventually, understanding, which inheres in human communication, reflects the birth of the Word made flesh for the purposes of loving union. As we saw in the last chapter, in book eight of *On the Trinity* Augustine describes how going out from the self is necessary for love to be love. "She is not charity if she loves nothing; but if she

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<sup>32</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homiliarum in Evangelia* 1.20.13 (PL 76:1166): "... per spinam ... corda audientium pungunt ... ut ab eorum oculis, quasi quidam sanguis animae, lacrimae decurrant"; quoted in Straw, *Gregory*, 204-205. On Gregory's descriptions of compunction as "piercing," see Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres*, 34-35, and Straw, *Gregory*, 225. The significance of compunction as a piercing grief goes back to its first-century medical origins. Joseph Pegon explains: "Le terme latin compunctio ne semble pas usité dans la langue profane ailleurs que dans le jargon médical, à partir du ive siècle, et au sens *dolor pungens*, élancement." Joseph Pegon, "Componction," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: Ascétique et mystique doctrine et histoire*, 1953 ed., s.v., 1312.

<sup>33</sup> *De trin.* 15.10.19-20 (CCSL 50A:486, 487): "... uerbum est quod in corde dicimus, quod nec graecum est nec latinum nec linguae alicuius alterius .... Ita enim uerbum nostrum uox quodam modo corporis fit assumendo eam in qua manifestetur sensibus hominum sicut uerbum dei caro factum est assumendo eam in qua et ipsum manifestaretur sensibus hominum." Trans. Hill, 409.

<sup>34</sup> *De trin.* 15.10.19 (CCSL 50A: 486): "Sed haec atque huiusmodi signa corporalia suae auribus sive oculis praesentibus quibus loquimur exhibemus." Trans. Hill, 409.

<sup>35</sup> *De trin.* 15.11.20 (CCSL 50A:487): "Assumendo quippe illam [carnem], non in eam se consumendo."

loves herself, she must love something in order to love herself as charity."<sup>36</sup> Two partners, self and other, are necessary to love. But, at the same time as it requires a separation, a birth, love also unifies. As Love, there is a birth within the Trinity, one thing proceeds from another, but it is all somehow simultaneous, instead of being linear and time-bound. At the same time as one part is flowing out, it is also flowing back. Origen's teaching that: "What came into this life emptied itself, so that through its emptiness the world would be fulfilled" reflects a similar balance between emptiness and fulfilment. For Augustine, although the Trinity comprehends separation and birth, it is also always unified.<sup>37</sup>

The principles of *caritas* — separation, desire and union — are reflected in human speech acts as well as in the divine speech act. Augustine argues that the reason that people are able to understand one another is not simply that they have learnt each other's languages. To say this is to be trapped in the *region of dissimilitude*, to take signs literally, as if that's all there is. But there is an understanding of Truth that transcends any language, that all languages are struggling to find. Yet, even though Truth transcends the words that speak it, we cannot arrive at Truth by transcending words. The latter expresses the aspiration of "pure contemplation." For Augustine, Christ's human incarnation demonstrates that we need this descent to wordy expression, we need the "stupidity of preachers" and "human beings learning from human beings."<sup>38</sup>

Our need for communication, our need to come to these understandings, is a motivating desire. The source of this desire is Truth itself. Truth is pulling us through the chatter of reason and the exhausting convolutions of wordiness.<sup>39</sup> We need this descent to expression in order to return the mind to what it once knew.

<sup>36</sup> *De trin.* 8.8.12 (CCSL 50:287-88): "Caritas enim non est quae nihil diligit. Si autem se ipsam diligit, diligit aliquid oportet ut caritate se diligit."

<sup>37</sup> On the birth of the Son in eternity see book two of *De trin.*. Summarising his argument in *De trin.* 4.20.28 (CCSL 50:198-99) Augustine makes a distinction between references to the Word "being born," which he says refer to his birth "from eternity to eternity," and his "being sent," which "means that he is known by someone in time." *De trin.* 2.5.8 (CCSL 50:89): "Quod ergo de deo natus est, in hoc mundo erat; quod autem de Maria natus est, in hunc mundum missus advenit."

<sup>38</sup> *De doct. Christ.* 1.12.12 (CCSL 32:13): "Cur ergo venit cum hic esset, nisi quia placuit deo per stultitiam praedicationis saluos facere credentes?" See also *De trin.* 4.20.28 (CCSL 50:198-99) where Augustine relates the Word's "being sent" into the world directly to the "stupidity of preaching" (1 Cor. 1.21).

<sup>39</sup> At the end of the twenty years he spends intermittently writing *On the Trinity*, Augustine collapses into despair from the struggle of the writing process; *De trin.* 15.28.51 (CCSL 50A:534).

but has forgotten. Truth is latent, but not lost entirely. The proof of our prior knowledge of Truth is attested by our desire for it, for how could we desire something of which we have absolutely no knowledge whatsoever?<sup>40</sup> If we do not follow desire and try to find Truth through our bits and pieces of ideas, then we will never redeem understanding and the desire that drives all of our restless thinking will never find its source.

Coming to understanding through communication is a redemption of love. Desire and union are lovers hidden within the acts of communicating and understanding. This is the underlying process involved in all human communication through all kinds of signs. Like the birth of the Word made flesh, the human birth of words also participates in the process of returning to love.

There is a parallel between communication and compassionate loving. In both there is the simultaneous presence of nothingness — the sign (words, tears, the human self, desire, matter) and Spirit (love, unification and understanding). Like love, communication involves a combination of perfection and loss, a descent to the fragmentation of signs and the conflicting difference of subjectivities, and redemption through the unification of understanding. In the last chapter we saw how, for Bernard of Clairvaux, the unification of two lost souls in compassionate recognition of one another's suffering offers a "reconciliation" with oneself, or a redemption of love, that fulfils the purpose of the incarnation. And, as for Origen or Augustine, for Bernard too, discovering love through Christ's humanity and the Word made flesh necessarily translates into a different epistemology from contemplation, one that emphasises the external expression of love. The unstifled yawns, the release of sobs and sighs, the frenzied screams — all of this body language is the mode of the bride.<sup>41</sup> Just as God's love became flesh, in Cistercian spirituality the effects of the emotions on the body come to be seen as a more natural, spontaneous and "naked" witness of truth. The *affectus* speaks free of the regulatory intellect.<sup>42</sup> Even a burp, Bernard rejoices, is evidence

<sup>40</sup> *De trin.* 10.1.1 (CCSL 50:312): "Nam quod quisque prorsus ignorat amare nullo pacto potest." For more of this argument see *De trin.* 10.1.1-10.3.5 (CCSL 50:311-319).

<sup>41</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *SC* 67.2.3 (SBO 2:190), cited above in full p. 93 n. 56.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, "Affectus locutus est, non intellectus."

of the truth held in the heart!<sup>43</sup> If this body language is stifled, the soul suffers rigor mortis. How can he hold up his heart to God if he has no hands?<sup>44</sup> "I have enough to do for hands and feet here below without the third heaven!" Bernard scoffs.<sup>45</sup>

As we saw in the last chapter, the ultimate expression of learning through compassion is weeping. There are hundreds of references to compunction in Bernard's oeuvre.<sup>46</sup> Scenes from his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* in which the bride is graced with tears of compunction closely parallel better-known descriptions in which she receives a spiritual kiss. In both, the feminine recipient is overcome, filled to overflowing with a holy love which is represented as a liquid ready to "gush forth" into fruitful charity.<sup>47</sup> As the birth of the Word, the gift of tears is impregnating. After tears of compunction and compassion a monk "does not go empty away" (Luc. 11.8). Instead, he returns "full of grace and love" and "unable to conceal" the gift he has received.<sup>48</sup> Without tears, Bernard describes his soul as "sterile," his heart is withered (Job 6.12), congealed like milk (Ps. 118.70), become like land without water (Ps. 142.6). He wishes that the river that refreshes the city of God perennially and abundantly (Ps. 45.5) "would inundate our mountains here on earth from time to time ... so that thus irrigated they might distil even rare droplets on us valleys, lest we remain entirely dry and barren."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> SC 67.3.4 (SBO 2:191): "Tamen odorem portat ructus, quandoque bonum, quandoque malum, pro vasorum, e quibus ascendit, contrariis qualitatibus. Denique 'bonus homo de bono thesauro suo profert bonum, et malus malum'" (Matth. 12.35).

<sup>44</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones ad clericos de conversione* 4.6 (SBO 4:77): "Neque enim carenti manibus erit ultra levare cor in caelum (Lam. 3.4) cum manibus." Bernard is playfully interpreting Gregory the Great's teaching on how flesh is necessary for repentance; *Moralia in Job* 25.6.10 (CCSL 143B:1235), cited in Straw, *Gregory*, 142.

<sup>45</sup> *De gradibus* 1.9.24 (SBO 3:35), quoted above p. 82 n. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Leclercq, introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., SC 9.5.7 (SBO 1:46): "Fantae nempe efficaciae osculum sanctum est, ut ex ipso mox, cum acceperit illud, sponsa concipiat, tumescentibus nimirum uberibus, et lacte quasi pinguescentibus in testimonium."

<sup>48</sup> SC 49.1.3 (SBO 2:74): "Verum cum te nobis redideris plenum gratia et caritate, non poteris spiritu fervens dissimulare munus acceptum ...."

<sup>49</sup> SC 54.4.8 (SBO 2:107): "Superbia inventa est in me, et Dominus declinavit in ira a servo suo. (Ps. 26.9) Hinc ista sterilitas animae meae, et devotionis inopia quam patior. Quomodo ita exaruit cor meum (Job 6.2), coagulatum est sicut lac (Ps. 118.70), factum est sicut terra sine aqua? (Ps. 142.6) Nec compungi ad lacrimas queo: tanta est duritia cordis (Marc. 16.14). Et quidem huius fluminis impetus laetificat civitatem Dei, sane perenniter et affluenter (Ps. 45.5). In nostros autem montes qui in terra sunt, utinam interdum facta quasi inundatione ... quibus sufficienter irrigati, nobis quoque, qui valles sumus, stillare vel raras guttulas possint, ne omnino aridi et steriles

In Bernard's descriptions, the birth of tears and the birth of words in the "rainfall of the soul" are virtually interchangeable. In the Virgin Mary's conception of the Word, a "truly free rain" fell gently into her womb, but in the world of men it became a drenching, ear-splitting storm, a din of words and miracles.<sup>50</sup> Tears and words are related as the material substance that carries the spiritual message through the world. Where the Word is borne by the preacher, the preacher himself is characterised as a suffering mother. His words are like tears. They renew, inseminate, fertilise and water the hearts of listeners with the "love that flowed into us" (Rom. 5.5). The shared associations of the experience of compunction and preaching are penetration, insemination, a suffering that is joyful because it is plenteous, and the outcome of a birth of words and tears that bring spiritual renewal to a barren land.

Bernard distinguishes between holy mothers who give birth to souls by preaching and the mystical bride who births spiritual insights through contemplation. Stating his preference for the bride, he explains that although a mother is happy with her child, a bride is even happier in the embrace of the bridegroom.<sup>51</sup> Yet, in a characteristic manoeuvre Bernard immediately confesses his own lack of *experience* of the Bridegroom's embrace and mounts a spirited defence of the "great and *sublime*" virtue of humility and its relationship with grace, thus backhandedly giving a preference to the experiential worth of the maternal preacher.<sup>52</sup> Richard of St-Victor teaches that the difference between contemplation and lesser ways of knowing is like the difference between pure sight and viewing (darkly) as if through a mirror (1 Cor. 13.12):

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remaneamus." Trans. Walsh and Edmonds, *Song*, 3:76. Cf. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum caritatis* 1.1 (PL 195:505).

<sup>50</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Homilia super "Missus est" in laudibus Virginis Matris* 2.7 (SBO 4:25-26): "Pluvia nempe voluntaria (Ps. 67.10), quam segregavit Deus hereditati suae, placide prius et absque strepitu operationis humanae, suo se quietissimo elapsu virginem demisit in uterum ... postmodum vero ubique terrarum diffusa est per ora praedicatorum, non iam sicut pluvia in vellus (Ps. 71.6), sed sicut stillicidia stillantia super terram, cum quodam utique strepitu verborum ac sonitu miraculorum."

<sup>51</sup> SC 85.4.13 (SBO 2:315, 316): "Sed attende in spirituali matrimonio duo esse genera pariendi ... cum sanctae matres aut praedicando, animas, aut meditando, intelligentias pariunt spirituales .... Et quidem laeta in prole mater, sed in amplexibus sponsa laetior."

<sup>52</sup> E.g., SC 85.4.14 (SBO 2:316): "... putas me posse eloqui quod ineffabile est? ... Non docet hoc lingua: docet gratia. Absconditur a sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelatur parvulis. Magna, fratres, magna et sublimis virtus humilitas ...."

Since it is far removed from every function of imagination, our understanding seems, in this activity, to understand itself by means of itself for the first time ... in the previous kinds of contemplation reason uses, as it were, an instrument and gazes, for example, into a mirror. In the present kind of contemplation it operates by means of sight.<sup>53</sup>

Bernard describes how, when the bride becomes a mother, her soul reflects the emotions of others, becoming “all things to all.” She becomes, as Kilian Walsh’s liberal translation draws out, like a *mirror* to the emotions of her fellows. “She became all things to all, mirrors in herself the emotions of all and so shows herself to be a mother to those who fail no less than to those who succeed.”<sup>54</sup> Unlike the purity of direct light, the mirroring of communication is a quintessentially human way of knowing, in which love is discovered through the identification one makes with other people.

Unlike contemplation, sacramental knowledge — the knowledge mediated through signs — is imperfect but redeemed. Instead of finding perfection in oneness, sacramental spirituality values coming to unity through the imperfection of mediation and mutuality. It is not about a descent to the cacophony of flesh, but about hearing the One Word, the word of love, through the flesh. “Although God speaks through humanity with many speeches, in Himself He speaks but one.”<sup>55</sup> But, Hugh of St-Victor teaches, if you listen carefully, the One Word can be discerned in the many. Augustine calls God’s speech in the world illumination. Hugh describes it as a “great sacrament”:

But whatever speech He expressed by human mouths, in all those words there was this unity, and in this unity all those words are one, since without this unity whatever is spoken at whatever place and time could not have been expressed. Let us examine this great sacrament.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De duodecim patriarchis* 72 (PL 196:51): “... remoto omni imaginationis officio, ipsa intelligentia nostra in hoc primum negotio seipsam per semetipsum intelligere videtur .... Illie quasi instrumento utitur [ratio], et velut per speculum intuetur. Hic per semetipsam operatur, et quasi per speciem contemplatur.” Translated in Richard of St-Victor, “*The Twelve Patriarchs*”; “*The Mystical Ark*”; “*Book Three of the Trinity*” trans. Grover Zinn, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1979), 163.

<sup>54</sup> SC 10.2.2 (SBO 1:49): “Omnibus se conformat, omnium in se transfert affectus, matrem se denique probat non minus deficientium quam proficientium.” Trans. Walsh, *Song* 1:62.

<sup>55</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De verbo Dei* 1.1 (SC 155:60): “Loquitur ergo per homines, loquitur per se, multos sermones per homines, unum per semetipsum.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, “Sed quocumque [sermones] per hominum ora protulit, iste unus in omnibus illis fuit, et omnes in isto uno unum sunt, qui sine isto quolibet loco vel tempore prolati esse non possunt. Videamus ergo magnum sacramentum.”

*The Life of Mary Magdalene*

The late twelfth-century anonymous Cistercian *Life of Mary Magdalene*<sup>57</sup> is a brilliant exploration of the theme of the birth and communication of the Word through a human preacher. Expressing its preference for the maternal preacher over the nubile bride, the culmination of Mary's development is her successful career as a preacher. Christ instructs the reader that: "He gives birth to me who, hearing me in his heart, preaches me; he becomes my mother, whose voice engenders the love of me in others."<sup>58</sup> With its frequent pedagogic reminders for the reader to "follow Mary's example" and "imprint her image upon himself,"<sup>59</sup> the *Life* is clearly intended as a spiritual guide to aspiring preachers. Perhaps in such a spiritual age we might even call it a practical guide. Beyond its hagiographic presentation of "the din of miracles" and the "broadcasting" of Mary's extraordinary preaching, it also explores the miracle of human communication itself. In the best tradition of theological reflection on the birth of the Word, the *Life* teaches a lesson about the necessary mutuality of incarnate knowledge. The epistemological question of how we know what we know is answered simply: through love.

There are three important scenes in which the Word is born through love in the *Life* that we shall look at. They are: the resurrection of Lazarus, the conversion of Mary, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The first of these we will consider, Jesus' raising of Lazarus, introduces the essential notion

<sup>57</sup> The heritage of *De vita Beatae Mariae Magdalene et sororis eius Sanctae Marthae* (hereafter cited as *VBMM*) (PL 112:1431-1508) has been a subject of some dispute amongst scholars. While Migne and other nineteenth century scholars attributed it to the Carolingian exegete, Rabanus Maurus, Victor Saxor has recently argued that its authorship is more probably Cistercian; Victor Saxor, "La 'Vie de Sainte Marie Madeleine' attribuée au pseudo-Raban Maur, oeuvre claravaliennne de XIIe siècle," *Mélanges Saint Bernard* (Dijon, 1953) cited in David Mycoff, introduction to *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha: A Medieval Biography*, trans. David Mycoff, Cistercian Studies, no. 108 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 26. Although I cannot comment on the manuscript's history, like Mycoff and Saxor, I shall interpret the *Life* as exemplifying Bernardine themes, closely engaged with his thought and thus a seemingly excellent example of late twelfth-century Cistercian spirituality.

<sup>58</sup> *VBMM* 11 (PL 112:1445): "Parit enim me, qui cordi audientis praedicat me; mater mea efficitur, per cuius vocem amor meus in aliis generatur." Trans. Mycoff, 43.

that a priest imitates Christ by becoming, as Paul put it, mothers to their little sons: "My little sons, again I am in labour with you, until Christ has been formed in you!" (Gal. 4.19) The incarnation reflects God's answer to Zion when she despairs, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me," and He replies, "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?" (Is. 49.14-15) Bernard of Clairvaux teaches that God became human so that He could love humanity and win them back to Him. Since his love for us came first (1 Joan. 4.19),<sup>60</sup> Christ must descend to humanity first. Bernard explains how, from his state of eternal compassion, which knows no misery in itself, Christ preceded to that form of human compassion "to which misery is the mother." "If he had not proceeded to that, he would not have attracted us; if he had not attracted us, he would not have extracted us [from sin]."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, our *Life* begins its Lazarus rebirth scene with a demonstration of God's visible and physical love for humanity: "Seeing Mary weep, he sighed in spirit and was troubled within. And Jesus wept! Jesus loved Martha, her sister Mary and Lazarus" (Joan. 11.5).<sup>62</sup> Bernard often describes how the untetherable passion of the bridal language of the *affectus* surpasses the halting discourse regulated by grammar, order, or number of words. Singing praises to God is a movement of the Spirit that is beyond words, Origen taught.<sup>63</sup> So in our *Life*, Jesus' tears transcend and outdo verbal expression. There is a purely intuitive empathy between Jesus and Mary. When Jesus sees Mary weeping, he sighs and weeps for her. The communication of the Word is not about words themselves.

The *Life* waxes lyrical about the miracle of the susceptibility of the Son of God to tears: "Oh tears most worthy of reverence, not mere tears, but tears of the Son of God, which flowed from his most holy eyes, which fell from his most

<sup>59</sup> *VBMM* 30 (PL 112: 1482): "... ut exemplum conversationis eius imitetur, ut conversationis eius formae imprimatur ..."; cited in Mycoff, *Life*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> *De dil.* 1.1 (SBO 3:120).

<sup>61</sup> *De gradibus* 1.3.12 (SBO 3:26): "Attamen si illa, quae miseriam nescit, misericordia non praecessisset, ad hanc, cuius miseria mater est, non accessisset. Si non accessisset, non attraxisset; si non attraxisset, non extraxisset." The wordplay is untranslatable.

<sup>62</sup> *VBMM* 15 (PL 112:1453): "... cum videns Mariam plorantem, infremuit spiritu, et turbavit seipsum. Et lacrymatus est Jesus! Diligebat enim Jesus Martham et sororem eius Mariam, et Lazarum" (Joan. 11.5).

<sup>63</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Psalms* fragment, trans. Daly/von Balthasar, *Origen*, 107.

beautiful eyes, which irrigated his most serene face."<sup>64</sup> Such sweet tears are proof of Christ's great love and incredible closeness to Mary and her family. The descent of God is an event so mysterious that Origen describes it as beyond human comprehension.<sup>65</sup> Like Origen's comment, the *Life* describes Christ's weeping as bearing witness to a love "surpassing the comprehension of all humanity and all angels" that burns between the Lord and Saviour and his friend Mary.<sup>66</sup>

Having established the mystery of God's bodily love for humanity (and dwelling on the inarticulate, physical nature of passion), the *Life* turns directly to Jesus' purpose, treating his salubrious task of "raising Lazarus." The ubiquitous topos of the preacher who lowers himself to weep together with the simple people expresses a Christ-like humility and compassion. It was commonplace pastoral advice that a priest should heed the words of Paul when he said, "Who is weak and I am not weak?" (2 Cor. 11.28-29) and participate in a mutual act of penitence.<sup>67</sup> In a passage in which he commends the penitential model of Magdalene, Ambrose of Milan long ago taught: "You preach penitence in vain, if you suppress the fruit of penitence."<sup>68</sup> In the penitential scene of Jesus' raising of Lazarus, Jesus gives birth to Lazarus. Having said a prayer to his Father, Jesus "cried out in a loud voice, he sighed, he was troubled, he wept. And he said, 'Lazarus, come forth.'"<sup>69</sup> In his priestly capacity, Jesus goes into labour with

<sup>64</sup> *VBM* 15 (PL 112:1452-53): "O lacrymas dignissimas reverentia, et non sine lacrymis nominandas! Lacrymas Filii Dei, quae de purissimis pupillis eius ebullierunt, quae de pulcherrimis eius oculis distillaverunt, quae serenissimum vultum eius irrigaverunt."

<sup>65</sup> Origen, *Peri Archôn (On First Principles)* 2.6.2 (PG 11:211): "... quinimo etiam fortassis totius creaturae coelestium virtutum eminentior est sacramenti istius explanatio." Cf., *De gradibus* 1.3.12 (SBO 3:25): "Quando nos illam miram miseridordiam cogitaremus ...?"

<sup>66</sup> *VBM* 15 (PL 112:1452): "O magnae pietatis affectum! O magni amoris argumentum! O inestimabilis familiaritatis indicium! Quis aestimare sufficeret alternum illum, qui tunc inter Dominum salvatorem et eius amicam Mariam fervecebat amorem, cuius indicium scimus illum dulcissimum lacrymarum ardorem! Credo, revera, amorem illum omni humanae, imo et angelicae creaturae incomprehensibilem."

<sup>67</sup> See for example, the so-called *Roman Penitential of Halitgar* (ca. 830) and *Reginos ecclesiastical discipline* (ca. 906) in John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer ed., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal "libri poenitentiales" and Selections from Related Documents*, Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies, no. 29 (New York: Octagon, 1965), 297-98; 315. See also Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.5 (PL 77:33).

<sup>68</sup> Ambrose, *De poenitentia* 1.16.89, in R. Gryson, ed., *Ambroise de Milan: La Pénitence*, SC 179 (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 124: "Frustra enim dicitis vos praedicare poenitentiam, qui tollitis fructum poenitentiae." Cf., Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.5 (PL 77:33).

<sup>69</sup> *VBM* 16 (PL 112:1454): "Ideo, voce magna clamavit, ideo fremit, ideo turbatus est, ideo lacrymatus est. Et ait: 'Lazare, veni foras.'" Cf., Heb. 5.7: "Qui in diebus carnis suae, preces

Lazarus, combining his injunction, "Lazarus come forth" with the maternal travail of his "crying out." Extending the commiseration between Jesus and Lazarus, and cementing the restorative purpose of the Incarnation, the *Life* invites its reader to "Sigh also within yourself, whomever you may be, who are weighted down with the habit of sin if you wish to be restored to life."<sup>70</sup>

Parallel to God's descent as Christ, from an all-knowing condition to feelings and the limits of embodiment, human love necessitates a similar descent. It is a descent from intellect to feelings, from egotism to the confines of relationship, from, in Bernard's terms, masculine to feminine. The incarnation becomes an experience for all men to undergo — a surrender of their rationality to their body. The emotional response of the soul is dramatic and immediately physical. The "wine of compunction" (Ps. 59.5), which all spiritual beginners must drink, is the language of the body.<sup>71</sup>

The conversion of Magdalene offers the author of the *Life* his most important opportunity for a lesson about compunction. Following Augustinian and Bernardine psychology on the passivity of the will, the *Life* describes Magdalene's soul as passively drawn by the forces of attraction. Her concupiscent soul is fickle attracted to all kinds of exterior, lowly pleasures. Magdalene's natural beauty is wasted, as she is "attracted by seductive attractions" and "possessed by seven demons."<sup>72</sup> When they were in paradise, Augustine taught, Adam and Eve shared in each other's happiness. They were perfectly content because the object of their desire was constantly in their possession.<sup>73</sup> After Adam's fall, however, humanity was left in a state of restless flux without a truly satisfactory object of desire. In the Augustinian model, compunction is an experience in which the soul realises the nature of its condition of distance from true Love. It is at once a profound moment of self-discovery and a realisation of

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supplicationesque ad eum qui possit illum salvum facere a morte, cum clamore valido et lacrymis offerens, exauditus est pro sua reverentia."

<sup>70</sup> *VBM* 16 (PL 112:1453): "Fremat et in te, quicumque es qui premeris peccandi consuetudine, si vis reviviscere."

<sup>71</sup> *De gradibus* 1.2.4 (SBO 3:19).

<sup>72</sup> *VBM* 3 (PL 112:1434): "... dum illecebrosis motibus illecta, ad illicita quaeque fluctuans animo ...." *VBM* 5 (PL 112:1436): "... septemplici daemonio occupata diceretur."

<sup>73</sup> *De civ. Dei* 14.10 (CCSL 48:430): "Amor erat imperturbatus in Deum atque inter se coniugum fida et sincera societate uiuentium, et ex hoc amore grande gaudium, non desistente quod amabatur ad fruendum."

dependency on God. Similarly, the *Life of Mary Magdalene* characterises Mary's compunction as the heart's recollection of an ancient predetermination. Just as Augustine begins his conversion scene by "recalling in sight of his heart all of his misery from its hidden depth,"<sup>74</sup> so too, when Mary "recalls her sinfulness in her heart," she begins to weep:

Recalling these things in her heart, she found herself far from God and far away and dissimilar from herself, and she began to weep (Marc. 14.72). God, to whom all things are known, poured out for her the wine of compunction (Ps. 59.5) ... and by a sudden and gracious motion of the Holy Spirit ... the young woman was inspired, saying to herself: "Know yourself, Mary, and remember who you were, and what you are now, and what you may become."<sup>75</sup>

Mary begins to weep in a moment of self-examination in which "She *found herself* far from God and *far away and dissimilar from herself*." Her recognition of herself in a region of dissimilitude is an Augustinian theme, adopted from Neoplatonic teachings. When Augustine "became a problem to himself," he admits that: "I could not even find myself, much less You."<sup>76</sup> So Mary finds herself far from God and from herself. The cumbersome but precise expression here to "know yourself as you were, as you are now, and as you may become" is very close to Richard of St-Victor's instruction in his *Mystical Ark* (*Benjamin Major*), that when you return to yourself, entering into your heart, you will learn what you are, what you were, and what you may become. Richard distinguishes these states as what one was by nature, what one is by sin and what one may become by grace.<sup>77</sup> These classifications are equally fundamental to Cistercian

<sup>74</sup> *Conf.* 8.12.28 (CCSL 27:130-31): "Ubi vero a fundo arcano alta consideratio traxit et congescit totam miseriam meam in conspectu cordis mei, oborta est procella ingens ferens ingentem imbrem lacrimarum."

<sup>75</sup> *VBM* 5 (PL 112:1436-37): "Haec recolens in corde se . . . enit se longe esse a Deo, sibi que longe dissimilem; et coepit flere (Marc. 14.72). Potavit eam vino compunctionis (Ps. 59.5) Deus, cui omne patet . . . gratuito et repentino instinctu Spiritus sancti . . . inspirata juvencula semet secum alloquens: 'Cognosce, inquit, Maria, temetipsam, et memento quid fueris, quidque nunc sis, quidve futura sis.'"

<sup>76</sup> *Conf.* 5.2.2 (CCSL 27: 78): "... ego autem et a me discesseram nec me inueniebam: quanto minus te!" Cf., *Conf.* 7.10.16 (CCSL 27:103): "... inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis"; On the use of this expression in Bernard of Clairvaux see Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, p. 224 n. 43. On twelfth-century usage generally see Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 261.

<sup>77</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De arca mystica* 3.3 (PL 196:113): "... ut redeas ad teipsum, intres ad cor tuum, discas aestimare spiritum tuum. Discute quid sis, quid fueris, quid esse debueris, quid esse poteris. Quid fueris per naturam, quid modo sis per culpam, quid esse debueris per industriam, quid adhuc esse possis per gratiam." Richard includes a fourth stage — what one should be by effort.

spirituality. The Magdalene *Life* makes a similar distinction. Beautiful by nature, Mary was deformed by sin and remade by grace.<sup>78</sup> Like Augustine's compunction, Mary's penitence is a moment when she recalls her former sins, as well as a moment when memory that ties her to her habitual sin is overcome. Memory is washed away as the newly cleansed self is distanced from the old. In what some traditions called a "baptism of tears," memory is washed away.<sup>79</sup>

Looking at this passage from the point of view of our earlier discussion of Bernard of Clairvaux's ideas about compassion, we can read Mary's experience of self-alienation and compunction as an internalised version of loving through *misericordia*. The love that Mary feels for herself is only possible because of her self-division into two — "experiencing herself far from herself." In the previous chapter, we looked at the social operation of charity.<sup>80</sup> Here, charity functions introspectively. Magdalene offers pity to herself when she recognises her own unloved self and mourns on her own behalf.

Bernard taught that the operation of love is necessarily an experience of compassion. Love unites two individuals as one because when you love someone else you identify yourself in them. All love is ultimately self-love. The love you offer to another is actually an offering of love to the version of yourself that you see in them. However, because the human self is defined by its separation from love, for humanity to love their true self in another entails an identification with the other's lack of love and need for love. Characterised as an act of grace, this is the love that Mary offers herself, when she redeems herself — or finds herself — through self-pity. Although she views herself telescopically in a far-away and dissimilar place, Mary expresses love for her miserable self by weeping on her own behalf. She identifies with her own dissimilar self when she pities it in her grace-filled tears, and thus redeems it from its foreignness.

Mary's compunction scene is followed by an interaction with Jesus that confirms the transformation that has taken place. When Jesus turns towards Mary,

<sup>78</sup> *VBM 3* (PL 112:1434).

<sup>79</sup> O' Loughlin and O'Briain, "The 'Baptism of Tears.'"

<sup>80</sup> We touched on introspective compassion when we looked at the passage in which Bernard teaches that compassion reconciles the soul to itself, see p. 99 n. 89.

he sees himself reflected in her eyes.<sup>81</sup> The definition of faith offered by the text is to experience the presence of Christ in the heart.<sup>82</sup> The love that Mary offers her own miserable self is the operation of Christ's mercy within her. And the testament to her finding Christ is his reflection in her soul. The bride, Bernard teaches, becomes a mother to all because the emotions of others are sympathetically reflected in her soul.<sup>83</sup> This focus on self-recognition through others is emphasised when Christ finds himself reflected in Mary's soul. And the text extends this intersubjectivity. After seeing himself in Mary's eyes, Jesus turns to the others present to ask them, "Do you see this woman?"<sup>84</sup> In other words, "Do you *really* see this woman, do you see her as I see her: do you recognise that I am in her, that she and I are one?" There is an immediate flow off from personal spiritual experience to public charity, showing that love, the essence between people, cannot be self-contained. In a striking formulation of the perils of dying without repenting, Bernard says that: "Whoever does not return to themselves before the death of the flesh, will necessarily have to remain within themselves for all eternity."<sup>85</sup> This underlines the essentially intersubjective nature of self-discovery defined as the discovery that one is loved.

The traditional turning point of compunction, from sorrow to joy, is characterised in the transformation of tears from bitter to sweet.<sup>86</sup> The birth of love in the soul will be painful but ultimately joyous. How many times, Bernard asks, do we return from compunction so filled with joy and optimism our enthusiasm is uncontainable?<sup>87</sup> The *Life* treats Mary's compunction as her impregnation. Mary's mourning turns to joy because she has been reborn:

Suddenly filled with ineffable joy, bearing in her heart the seven gifts of the Spirit, her tears not entirely suppressed, but diminished, for at first she wept in the bitterness of punishment, but afterwards in the joy of forgiveness. The

<sup>81</sup> *VBMM* 7 (PL112:1439-40): "Moxque a mensa aversus, ad Mariam conversus, in cuius corde, jucundius quam in mensa, prandebat, desiderabilem vultum suum ei videndum praebuit, et serenissimis oculis eam benignissime respexit."

<sup>82</sup> *VBMM* 15 (PL 112:1452): "... quia fides de Christo, Christus est in corde."

<sup>83</sup> *SC* 10.2.2 (SBO 1:49), for Latin see above p. 122 n. 54.

<sup>84</sup> *VBMM* 7 (PL112:1439-40): "... 'vides,' inquit, 'hanc mulierem?'"

<sup>85</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones ad clericos de conversione* 4.6 (SBO 4:77): "... sed quisquis ante obitum carnis non redierit ad seipsum, in seipso maneat necesse est in aeternum."

<sup>86</sup> McEntire demonstrates the pervasiveness of this view of tears; *Doctrine of Compunction*, chapters one to four.

<sup>87</sup> *SC* 49.1.3 (SBO 1:74-75): "Verum cum te nobis reddideris plenum gratia et caritate, non poteris spiritu fervens dissimulare munus acceptum ...."

flowing stream made glad the city of God, that is to say, Mary's heart, in which the Most High sanctified the tabernacle of God (Ps. 45.5).<sup>88</sup>

The distinction here between tears that express the bitterness of punishment and those that are filled with the joy of forgiveness is a version of Paul's ethical distinction between obedient submission to punishment and voluntary acquiescence. Bernard often describes the "slavish spirit" of the novice who obeys God only out of the "fear that expects punishment," and the love of the Bride that dismisses fear, following 1 John 4.18: "... perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love."<sup>89</sup> When Mary's tears express the joy of forgiveness instead of the bitterness of punishment, as it says in 1 John, she has become perfected in love. Jesus formally absolves her with the words, "Your sins are forgiven. The ardour of your love has annulled (that is, deleted) the corruption of all of your sins."<sup>90</sup> After her contrition and the deliverance of absolution, Magdalene's reborn self becomes immaculate: "From this point on, there was no corruption, either of body or soul ... there was nothing but good — there was no portion of evil within her."<sup>91</sup> Magdalene's transformation to immaculacy at this juncture prepares her for a higher mystical experience at the crucifixion scene in which she imitates the Virgin by giving birth to the Word.

The structure of the crucifixion scene in the *Life of Mary Magdalene* follows that of traditional Eastern Marian laments, which often took the form of a

<sup>88</sup> *VBMM* 8 (PL 112:1441): "... moxque gaudio ineffabili plena ... septiformem Spiritum in pectore portans; lacrymarum impetu non quidem represso, sed minutato. Quae enim prius fuerant amaritudinis ex poena, factae sunt laetitiae ex percepta venia. Tunc 'fluminis impetus laetificat' mentem Mariae. 'civitatem Dei,' tunc sanctificavit tabernaculum suum Altissimus (Ps. 45.5) in illa." Cf., *SC* 54.4.8 (SBO 2:107). Mycoff translates "poena" here as "penance," but I prefer "punishment" to emphasise its closeness to Bernard's many discussions of the difference between a "slavish spirit" who obeys God only from the "fear that expects punishment" and the bride whose love dismisses fear.

<sup>89</sup> E.g., *SC* 84.1.6 (SBO 2:305-6). Cf. the difference between the freedom of charity and the bondage of fear characterised as the "old man" and the new, and the "rights of regeneration" as a transition point between them, see Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 36.2 (CCSL 44A:56) see above p. 49 n. 101.

<sup>90</sup> *VBMM* 8 (PL 112:1440-41): "... ait illi, 'Remittuntur tibi peccata. Ardor enim amoris tui enullavit [id est, delevit] aeruginem omnis delicti tui.'"

<sup>91</sup> *VBMM* 8 (PL 112:1441): "Ex tunc, non animi vitium vel corporis ullum fuit in illa .... in ea quaeque pars boni sit, portio nulla mali." Gregory the Great also taught that Mary Magdalene "washed out the stain of her sins with her tears by her love of the truth .... She who had previously been cold through sin was afterwards aflame with love." *Homiliarum in Evangelia* Hom. 21 (PL 76:1189) cited in Benedicte Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, Cistercian Studies, no. 106 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 12.

dialogue between mother and son. Like liturgical responses, there is a strict symmetry between action and reaction.

Christ was led to be crucified and Mary followed, her tears showing her affection. Christ was raised on the cross; Mary cried out, and he was crucified. Christ was pierced with nails on the cross; the soul of Mary was pierced with sharp grief.<sup>92</sup>

As is conventional to Marian laments, Christ's impassiveness shows his obedience to his Father's will and his foreknowledge of the plan of redemption.<sup>93</sup> Two models of spirituality are represented in Christ and Mary. Christ exhibits a stoic resignation to suffering. Whilst Christ is firmly fixed on transcending the earthly realm, Mary's grief harks back to an ancient theme of earthly rebirth through maternal mediation.<sup>94</sup> During his crucifixion, Christ's reaction follows the stoic representation of Matthew: he prays to his Father for those who are crucifying him (Matth. 27.40). But on the other hand:

In all this, what sorrow was in the soul of Mary, what sobbing, what sighing, what grief, when the lover saw her beloved hang amidst thieves. Her grief swelled beyond bounds at that instant when one of the soldiers pierced the Saviour's side with a lance, and drew it out, and water and blood flowed from the breast already grown cold.<sup>95</sup>

As his spouse, the crucifixion affects Mary; she is nothing but responsive throughout the entire scene. As a mother, she is rebirthing him, overflowing "beyond bounds." Traditional Marian laments often hinge on the issue of Mary's right to express her grief over her son's death. Whilst Christ inevitably wins the theological debate and reconciles his mother to the necessity of his death, he does so only at the expense of a vital concession: she will allow him to die but he may not prohibit her grief for him. And because he cannot prevent her grief, she has stolen the effect of his death by rebirthing him, reintegrating his body to the earth

<sup>92</sup> *VBM* 21 (PL112:1463): "... ducitur Christus ad crucifigendum. Maria sequitur; et ploratibus probat affectum. Christus in cruce levatur, Maria ejulat, et cruciatur. Christus in cruce clavis configitur; Mariae anima moeroris aculeis perforatur ...."

<sup>93</sup> On the character of laments as dialogue see Dobrov, "Dialogue with Death"; on the dilemma between Christ's foreknowledge of the resurrection and his mother's agony over his necessary death see Sticco, *Planctus Mariae*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> On this theme in Greek women's laments see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*; Danforth, *Death Rituals*.

<sup>95</sup> *VBM* 21 (PL 112:1464): "Quanta inter haec omnia, fuit in mente Mariae tristitia, qui singultus, quot suspiria, dum dilecti dilectoris sui, inter latrones pendentis, dolores cerneret! ... Cuius e vestigio immensum crevit moestitia, cum unus ex militibus latus Salvatoris perforavit lancea, et continuo, de frigidi pectoris penetralibus, fluxit sanguis et aqua."

through the medium of her fleshly tears. The resurrection is not the triumph of Hosea's "No birth!" (Hos. 9.11), Luke's blessing of barren wombs (Luc. 23.29), or Matthew's "Let the dead bury their dead!" (Matth. 8.22) Instead, through Mary's mediation, Christ does not disappear from the world.

Sandro Sticco points out that Origen is "the first to have expressed the concept of the mirroring of the Passion of Christ in the soul of the Virgin Mary."<sup>96</sup> The first line of the crucifixion scene in the *Life of Mary Magdalene* shows the author's use of the Origenist theme of interpreting the resurrection as a birth that takes place in Mary. "'Love is as strong as death' (Cant. 8.6) this was seen in the Lord's Passion, when Mary's love did not die."<sup>97</sup> In Mary's conversion scene, Christ recognises himself in Mary's eyes. He asks the others whether they "see this woman" and acknowledge that he has been reborn in her. Reciprocally, in the resurrection, Mary recognises Christ, as others do not. They cannot "find" him because they do not believe in his resurrection — and Mary does. Yet, when Mary enters Jesus' tomb, tears blind her eyes. With her outward vision obscured and through the travail of her compunction, she finds the resurrected Christ in her heart.<sup>98</sup> Christ wants reassurance of her faith because it is necessary for his rebirth.

At last the Saviour was convinced that the love he had before taken such pleasures in had never ceased to burn in the breast of his first servant and special friend, and he — from whom no secret is hidden — knew that he had ascended to the father in the heart of his perfume-maker.<sup>99</sup>

Mary realises that Christ and the Father are one and that her loving identification — a kind of equality — with the Son now makes her one with the Father. She realises full divinisation in herself. Christ knows that he has ascended to the Father *in the heart of his perfume-maker*. Christ is resurrected because *Mary* sees his equality with the Father as true in her heart. It is a material resurrection, taking

<sup>96</sup> Sticco, *Planctus Mariae*, 33.

<sup>97</sup> *VBM* 21 (PL 112:1463): "'Fortis ut mors dilectio' (Cant. 8.6) ... cemitur Domini passio, nec cessat Mariae devotio ...." (Lit. "her devotion did not cease.")

<sup>98</sup> *VBM* 26 (PL 112:1471-74); cited immediately below n. 132. Cf., Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in ascensione domini* 3.4 (SBO 5:133): "Et ille quidem, illis plorantibus (Joan. 16.20), elevatus in caelum" (Luc. 24.51).

<sup>99</sup> *VBM* 26 (PL 112:1474): "Persuasus denique Salvator, suavissima praerogativa pristini, qui in primiceriae suae et specialis amicae pectore nunquam ardere desiderat, amoris; sciens certissime,

place in the heart of the sensual perfume-maker. As a birth of the spirit of love, it is also a necessarily relative experience, which is entirely dependent on human interaction.

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In each of the scenes we have looked at — the resurrection of Lazarus, the repentance of Mary and the crucifixion — love is discovered through mutuality. Christ knows that he is resurrected *through* Mary. Lazarus is reborn *because* of Christ and Mary's love. Mary's rebirth is realised when *Christ* sees himself in her and finally Christ himself is reborn because of the love that never ceases to burn in *Mary's* breast. Compassionate knowledge of love is an intrinsically mediated epistemology. Emphasising the materiality of mediated truth, Mary's spiritual culmination is her debut as a maternal preacher. As a preacher, Mary mediates the transformative Word, or the experience of love, moving audiences of hundreds to tears of compunction. "He gives birth to me who, hearing me in his heart, preaches me; he becomes my mother, whose voice engenders the love of me in others."<sup>100</sup> It exemplifies the theme of this chapter that the *Life* presents this as a gloss on Matth. 12.46-49: "Whoever follows the will of my father is my brother ..." — a passage in which Jesus rejects his mother!

Contemporary theologian John Crichton argues that the defining feature of Christianity is Christ's communication of himself in sacrament.<sup>101</sup> The idea that the Word — that is, transcendent meaning — is born into the world by a mother emphasises the sacramental nature and the humility of mediated truth. Twice limited, truth becomes material and thus perishable and shared, and thus not self-sufficient. Yet, since we are born, not unborn, beings, learning through *miser cordia* is the highest knowledge humanity can achieve, truth is impure and

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quippe quem nullum latet secretum, se, in corde credentis pigmentariae suae, iam ad Patrem ascendisse."

<sup>100</sup> *VBMM* 11 (PL 112:1445): "Parit enim me, qui cordi audientis praedicat me; mater mea efficitur, per cuius vocem amor meus in aliis generatur."

<sup>101</sup> J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12.

dependent on mediation. Love does not “exist,” it “consists” (*cum stare*) between people. Like the recognition of love that depends on a return to self, suffering, neediness and embodiment before any sense of divine presence can be experienced, communication also involves a combination of perfection and loss. A loving knowledge is shared, it exists in communication, in signs, in bodies, between subjectivities — in the “God-man.” God could not exist for humanity without being a part of creation. We could have no knowledge of him because we could not love him. And God becomes a part of creation, he becomes human and not perfect, when he feels our grief. Thus, God’s tears represent his communication.

## *Marie of Oignies and the Naked Book of the Heart*

But yet what is believed by the same faith is absent from the sight of our body ... and from the sight of another's mind, as is your faith from the sight of our mind although I believe that it is in you, when I do not see with the body what you cannot nor with the mind what you can, just as I can see by my faith what you cannot.

Hugh of St-Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*

He who believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from his body.

John 7.38

### *Introduction – The Effect of Compunction*

Following the example set by Christ as the Book of Life, one's whole life should be lived as an expression of the open "book of the heart," Hugh of St-Victor teaches.<sup>1</sup> The "open book of his heart" is represented by St. Francis when he "went up naked to the pulpit," preaching "marvellously" about "contempt of the world," penance, desire for the Kingdom of heaven, and on "the nakedness and humiliations of the most Holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified."<sup>2</sup> Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1301) describes how the bare flesh of the priest's hand

<sup>1</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De verbo Dei* 5.2 (SC 155:76): "Libri sunt corda hominum .... Libri aperiuntur quando manifesta sunt secreta cordium .... Adhuc scribi debent libri nostri secundum exemplar libri vitae, sicut dicit Apostolus: 'Estote imitatores Christi sicut filii carissimi' (1 Cor. 4.16) ... Conferamus itaque libros nostros cum hoc libro ...."

<sup>2</sup> *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* 30, in *Saint Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of Saint Francis* (henceforth cited as *Omnibus*), ed. Marian A. Habig, trans. Raphael Brown, Benen Fahy, Placid Hermann, Paul Oigny, NESTA de Robeck, Leo Sherley-Price, 3rd rev. ed. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1972), 1376.

touches her more closely than his expensive vestments. The physical intimacy of communicating by touch breaks down the pretence of wealth and worldly power and demonstrates the lesson of God's preference for human weakness over spiritual proficiency and authority. Although God is fairly pleased with the work of prayers, fasts and vigils, Gertrude argues that He is drawn towards the Elect "with greater compassion when they are forced by their human weakness to have recourse to my mercy just as the bare flesh of the priest's hand touches me more closely than his vestments."<sup>3</sup> There is a strong subversive aspect to thirteenth-century incarnationalism. An intense spirituality focused on the coincidence between Christ's naked, dispossessed humanity and the spiritual power of divine love and revelation blossomed amongst popular but politically marginal religious fellowships like the Beguines, the early Franciscans, the Poor Clares and other women's religious houses.

The single most important theological theme of the new spirituality is that Christ became flesh in order to redeem humanity through love. The sacramental expressiveness typical of thirteenth-century spirituality conveys this fundamental soteriology. As we saw in the last chapter, sacramental literalism itself expresses Christocentrism, since it is about viewing the letter of the Word made flesh as the locus of the expression of love. Highlighting the important and intimate connection between spirituality that scholars have described as "externalised," "psychosomatic" or "literalised" and sacramental theory, Gertrude's sisters at the convent of Helfta explain her literalising, physical style of spiritual expression by citing the authority of Hugh of St-Victor, who teaches that: "Divine Scripture condescended to human fragility by describing invisible things through visible forms."<sup>4</sup> Divinity's "condescension to human fragility" is not just about humanity

<sup>3</sup> Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus divinae pietatis* 3.18; translated in Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Margaret Winkworth, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 180. The vestments were an elaborate and very expensive item. A story told in Thomas of Cantimpre's *Supplement* to James of Vitry's *Vita Beatae Mariae Oigniacensis* (henceforth cited as *VMO*) tells of how a poor priest was devastated when a fire destroyed his silk vestments, since it took many years and the aid of divine intervention before he was able to acquire new ones. (They came as a gift from the wealthy bishop of Acre, James of Vitry.) Thomas à Cantimpré, *Supplement to "The Life of Marie d'Oignies,"* 13; trans. Hugh Feiss, *Matrologia Latina*, 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: Peregrina, 1990), 35-37.

<sup>4</sup> Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus* 1.4 in *Oeuvres Spirituelles*, vol. 2, *Le Héraut I and II*, ed. Pierre Doyère, SC 127, Série des textes monastiques d'Occident, no. 19 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 124: "Quod magister Hugo testatur sic in sermone *De interiori homine* cap. 16: "Divinae Scripturae, et

learning divine truths, but about the mission of human redemption through love. Like the signs that reveal Scripture, the sisters describe how Gertrude unhesitatingly condescends to allow her own body to become — like Mary Magdalene as she weeps at Christ's feet — an "instrument of the Lord," designed to show the "operation of divine love in and through herself."<sup>5</sup>

This much-discussed female imitation of Christ is an amplified but not incongruous extension of the theme of the birth of the Word that we looked at in the context of twelfth-century descriptions of preaching. Gertrude's surrender of her body as an instrument to the Lord is not dissimilar to conventional descriptions of the way a preacher opens his body and soul to the task of reception and conveyance of the Word. Indeed, one of the functions that Gertrude's instrumental body lends itself to is preaching. In their descriptions of her body as a vehicle for the phenomenally powerful Word she preaches, Gertrude's sisters follow patristic and twelfth-century conventions.<sup>6</sup> Highlighting the traditional connection between the externalisation of the Word and suffering, her sisters describe how Gertrude's book is written with "her pen dipped, as it were, in her heart's blood."<sup>7</sup> The very writing of her book, in other words, is conceptualised as an incarnation.

Gertrude tells a story, designed for the edification of the simple people, entitled "The Effects of Compunction." In the story, the effectiveness of her sisters' tears of compunction is so great that it creates a vapour around the nunnery of Helfta, protecting it from an "invading force." "The greater the contrition of heart and the stronger the inclination to good will, the more efficacious was the vapour exhaled from the persons in repulsing the hostile forces."<sup>8</sup> We might view James of Vitry's seminal *Life of a Beguine woman, Marie of Oignies (1176-1213)*, as a demonstration of "the effects of

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inferiorum speculationi alludent et humanae fragilitati condescendant, res invisibiles per rerum visibilibus formas describunt ...."

<sup>5</sup> *Legatus* 1.10; trans. Winkworth, 68-69.

<sup>6</sup> *Legatus* 1.3 (SC 127:124): "Habebat etiam dulce eloquium et penetrans, linguam tam disertam, sermonem tam suadibilem, efficacem et gratiosum, quod quamplures verba ipsius audientes revera testimonium evidens reddebant spiritui Dei qui loquebatur in ea (Act. 6.10) per mirabilem cordis emolitionem, et voluntatis mutationem. Verbum siquidem vivum et efficax et penetrabilius omni gladio ancipiti, pertingens usque ad divisionem animae et spiritus (Heb. 4.12), habitans in ea operabatur haec omnia .... Quosdam per verba eius compungens ad salutem ...."

<sup>7</sup> *Legatus* 1.6; trans. Winkworth, 63. Similarly, Mechtild of Magdeburg describes how she continues writing, weeping all the while; *Fliessende Licht* 3.18 (Morel, 180).

compunction.” Like the compunction in Gertrude’s story, that has a powerful effect in the real world, James describes Marie’s miraculous gift of tears as an historical event. As was characteristic of twelfth-century biblical exegesis, the *Life of Mary Magdalene* also emphasised the experiential reality of Magdalene’s historical world, evoking all of the reader’s senses to stimulate the imaginative experience of really being there. The evocation to historical present in the *Life of Mary Magdalene* becomes present history in James of Vitry’s *Life of Marie*. In James’ telling, “You were there.”<sup>9</sup> In quasi-journalistic style, his prologue to the *Life* calls on witnesses to the holy virgins in the “promised land” of Liège. Referring to Bishop Fulk of Toulouse’s visit to Lorraine, James invokes him as an eyewitness: “You saw these things, and rejoiced in them.”<sup>10</sup> “With your own eyes you saw God’s marvellous works” — not just with any eyes, but with the “eyes of the faith” that “see things as others cannot” and reveal new experiences of wonderful things.<sup>11</sup> James is not simply telling his audience that his marvellous *Life* is true, he is instructing them about the perspective of faith. Seen through the eyes of the faith, external reality becomes an exemplary lesson. All things are marvellous when they are seen subjectively as a living revelation of hidden truths. Marie, he teaches, was illuminated by faith, so that she “perceived invisible things which God revealed to her as if they were visible with the eyes of the faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Following Hugh’s radical instruction to take the model of the Book of Life writ large in one’s own life, James describes how, when people look at Marie’s teary-eyed face, they read her “like a book” and know that virtue comes from her.<sup>13</sup> The idea of themselves as a “pattern (*forma*) and example (*exemplum*)” to

<sup>8</sup> Gertrude, *Legatus* 3.48; trans. Winkworth, 216.

<sup>9</sup> As Rachel Fulton notes, this “eye witness” approach to history stems from Hugh of St-Victor’s instructions in historiography; “Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs” *Viator* 27 (1996): 110-14.

<sup>10</sup> James of Vitry, *VMO* Prol. 3 (AASS June 23, vol. 5 p. 547, hereafter cited by page only): “Vidisti ... multas sanctarum virginum.” *VMO* Prol. 2 (547): “... terram promissionis in partibus Leodii invenisti.” *VMO* Prol. 3 (547): “... vidisti et gavisus es.”

<sup>11</sup> *VMO* Prol. 5 (548): “Oculis enim tuis vidisti mirabilem Dei operationem ....”; *VMO* Prol. 2 (547): “... fide oculata per experientiam cognovisses.”

<sup>12</sup> *VMO* 2.7.71 (563): “Illuminabatur ad fidem; si tamen fides in ea proprie dici valeat, quia Domino revelante invisibilia, quasi visibiliter fide oculata percipiebat.” Translated in Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie d’Oignies*, trans. Margot H. King, *Matrologia Latina* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1987), 85.

<sup>13</sup> *VMO* 1.4.39 (556): “... multi ex eius aspectu spiritualiter refecti ad devotionem et lacrimas provocabantur; et in vultu eius, quasi in libro unctionem Spiritus sancti legentes, virtutem ex ea procedere cognoscebant.”

their followers was an important and distinctive aspect of regular canons' self-conception, Bynum argues.<sup>14</sup> To teach the Christian message was to actively demonstrate virtue in one's own exemplary life; to become, as St. Francis put it, mothers to Christ through one's virtuous actions.<sup>15</sup> Thus, James instructs preachers to use the model of Marie's life as an *exemplum* in their sermons.<sup>16</sup> When he describes how people read Marie's piteous face as a sign of virtue, James declares that they are reading "the Unction of the Spirit" in her.<sup>17</sup> This expression points to 1 John 2.27: "His unction will teach you concerning all things." Like Gertrude's effective compunction, James is telling a story of Marie designed to teach. More than that, he creates a model and a sign of her, so that Marie, like Gertrude, teaches "in and through herself." Marie's wondrous weeping is so excessive it overflows in her footprints.<sup>18</sup> A footprint is a classic trope of a sign. Augustine uses it in his introduction to signs, *On Christian Doctrine*. A sign is like a footprint — when we see it, we know by the footprint which animal has gone there.<sup>19</sup> Gregory the Great instructs that a priest's progress will be blameless if he unceasingly contemplates the example of the fathers who came before him by his vigilant consideration of their holy footprints.<sup>20</sup> Deeply influenced by the teaching of his great mentor, Hugh of St-Victor, James' *Life of Marie* experiments with Hugh's theme that the world has become a "great sacrament."<sup>21</sup> Under the bright lights of sanctity, James hopes that his *Life of Marie* will illuminate his reader's mind "as if by flashing stars."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 39, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Francis of Assisi, "Letter to all the Faithful," in *Omnibus*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> James agrees to entrust the example of Marie to his friend Bishop Fulk of Toulouse to be used as an example in his sermons against heretics, but only after she is dead; *VMO* Prol. 10 (549).

<sup>17</sup> *VMO* 1.4.39 (556), quoted above p. 138 n. 13.

<sup>18</sup> *VMO* 1.1.16 (551): "... tantam lacrimarum copiam ... quod vestigia eius per ecclesiam, lacrimae super pavementum copiose defluentes ostendebant."

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *De doct. Christ.* 2.1 (CCSL 32:32): "... sicut uestigio uiso transisse animal cuius uestigium est cogitamus."

<sup>20</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.2 (PL 77:27): "Nam tunc sacerdos irreprehensibiliter graditur, cum exempla patrum praecedentium indesinenter intuetur, cum Sanctorum vestigia sine cessatione considerat ...." The idea of following the footprints of the saints was a commonplace; e.g., *Scripta Leonis et al.* 38, in *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli Sociorum S. Francisci: The Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo Companions of St. Francis*, ed. and trans. Rosalind B. Brooke Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 156: [Francis instructs] "... tantum dulcedinem et consolationem inuenio cotidie in mea memoria et meditatione humilitatis vestigiorum Filii Dei ...."

<sup>21</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De verbo Dei* 1.1 (SC 155:60) quoted above p. 122 n. 56. On James of Vitry's close connection to the school of St-Victor and Hugh's influence on him see Ernest W.

Caroline Bynum's ground-breaking work in the area of later medieval women's spirituality describes how the emphasis on the imitation of Christ's humanity in the twelfth century created the possibility for a new prominent role for women in religious life. That possibility was fulfilled in the large increase in the number of women drawn into a religious way of life. Earlier scholars had explored the economic, social and political grounds for the emergence of this thirteenth-century "women's movement." Bynum emphasised another causal factor: that women were attracted to religion because of its content. The feminised Christology, even a feminised Deity, gave women a special creative opportunity to exercise a new self-expression. Women became prominent figures in the most progressive elements of the new spirituality. They became charity workers and mendicants, writers and poets, political figures, saints and mystics. Bynum's optimistic appraisal of the humanist spirituality of the thirteenth-century "women's movement" inspired a wave of sympathetic interest in late medieval women's spirituality. In different ways, Newman, Petroff, Lochrie and others<sup>23</sup> viewed externalisation, psychosomatism, literalism and humanism as an expression of female identity. Instigated by Amy Hollywood's critique of Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, some recent interpretation of women's spirituality of this period views the externalisation and psychosomatism celebrated by earlier scholars as the most politically suspicious area of the new spirituality. A number of recent studies emphasise the political motivations for the literalisation of women's spirituality, especially in Beguine hagiography. Hollywood has argued that externalisation and literalism were not a product of a

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McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene*, (New York: Octagon, 1969), 34.

<sup>22</sup> *VMO* Prol. 11 (549): "... lectoris animus, tamquam stellis interlucentibus illustretur."

<sup>23</sup> Bynum's principal works on this include: "Maternal Imagery in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing," in *Noble Piety and Reformed Monasticism*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, Cistercian Studies, no. 65, Studies in Medieval Cistercian History, no. 7 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981); *Jesus as Mother: Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century"; "And Woman His Humanity"; "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 119-50; 151-79; 181-238. Although each is very different in approach, recent works that share Bynum's optimism and enthusiasm for women's spirituality of this period include: Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

new women's spirituality but were, instead, a construction that male hagiographers imposed on their female subjects.<sup>24</sup> Rather than being an authentic and empowering expression of an alternative spirituality, Hollywood argues that the externalisation of women's spirituality was politically motivated and ultimately disempowered the women who were the subjects of hagiography, turning them into a passive template for male manipulation. Commenting particularly on Beatrice of Nazareth's hagiographer's externalisation of her interior spirituality, Hollywood describes how: "The visionary woman becomes a vision, a divinely marked body, a spectacle for the viewing pleasure of her contemporaries."<sup>25</sup>

Hollywood does see an avenue for women's empowerment and intellectual endeavour within the new spirituality, but not within the incarnationalism with which women are so much associated. Instead, she argues that whilst men turned women into performative bodies, firsthand accounts by thirteenth-century women themselves show that women resisted this role and sought a more interiorised spirituality in harmony with their male counterparts.

As the first *Life* of a Beguine, James of Vitry's *Life of Marie of Oignies* was an innovative prototype in its day. Ever since it was quoted in the opening pages of Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, the *Life of Marie* has become a model of thirteenth-century incarnationalism.<sup>26</sup> Exemplifying the now problematic association of women with the body, Marie's primary spiritual expression are her copious tears, which literally: "In any effort she might make to verbally explain herself and drown out the possibility of future historians hearing her authentic voice. In the *Life of Mary Magdalene*, a text offering a female spiritual model for men, Mary undergoes all of the initiatory upheaval of her various teary experiences before heading out into the world as an Apostle to the Apostles and "mother to the Word" to give birth to extraordinary sermons that reduce flocks of hundreds to penitential tears. In the *Life of Marie of Oignies*, a text which stars an

<sup>24</sup> Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), chapter one. See also the collection of essays edited by Catherine M. Mooney, *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 13. Brenda Bolton also introduces her article on the "*Vitae Matrum*" with a reference to the Prologue of the *VMO*: "*Vitae Matrum*: A Further Aspect of the *Frauenfrage*," in Derek Baker, ed., *Medieval Women*, 253-73 (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1978).

emphatically real woman, Marie's tears never graduate to verbal expression. Her mute teariness alone would seem to vindicate Hollywood's point. Yet James' presentation of Marie's extraordinarily communicative tears is not a "limitation" James imposes on Marie in consideration of her gender. As we shall see, James is equally enthusiastic about non-verbal communication for men. James of Vitry — renowned as one of the greatest preachers in a time of preaching excellence — promotes a movement that challenges verbal primacy *per se*. Since medieval theologians generally associated words and verbal expression with higher areas of knowledge and mental capabilities, valuing tears as "better than words"<sup>27</sup> exemplifies the reversal and descent that is at the heart of the incarnationalist message. James' promotion of Marie's tears above words is an incarnationalist manifesto.

The tension in Christian spirituality over the merits of an ascensionist, contemplative path and the path of descent indicated by the Incarnation is a perennial one that has surfaced in many different contexts. In the thirteenth century, when the claims of the latter grew so strong, ascensionism naturally reasserted itself. One very often finds tension and contradiction over which path is better within the work of a single author — as we observed in Bernard of Clairvaux for example. Some women may, as Hollywood argues, have rejected incarnationalist spirituality because they found it limiting. But incarnationalism and descent remain a genuine spiritual alternative to contemplation, not simply an externalisation for political reasons (though it may be this as well).

The passage of Hugh of St-Victor chosen by the Helfta nuns, which says that Divine Scripture condescended to human fragility by its visible expression, expresses the fundamental twin aims of the new spirituality: teaching and revelation of Christ's compassionate love — an incarnate and humanist love. The Word was made flesh to teach and to demonstrate spiritual truth. The message of hagiographical and firsthand accounts alike is that this makes spiritual truths accessible to "simple people." But, just as descent to flesh is necessary for communication, it is also necessary for transformation and salvation through love.

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<sup>27</sup> *Little Flowers* 34 (*Omnibus*, 1383): "We heard without sound made by lips or tongue even better than if we had spoken with our lips — and with greater consolations ... the defect of human language ... cannot clearly express the secret mysteries of God."

So it is not just “for the simple people”; the message of this spirituality is that love makes simple people of us all.

The reasons for valuing tears above words express core incarnational themes. In this chapter we shall see that tears demonstrated: simplicity of faith and rhetorical effectiveness, the *via affectus*; penitential rebirth; and sacrament. Whilst James of Vitry’s *Life of Marie of Oignies* will be our means of approach to the new spirituality, I have been unable to resist drawing frequent parallels with other contemporary and somewhat later spiritual texts. Themes from the *Life of Marie* will blossom out to reveal whole branches of spiritual direction. These comparisons have the added advantage of allowing us to move from James of Vitry’s secondhand account of Marie’s spirituality to texts authored by spiritual men and women themselves. The authors we shall look at include: two Dominican nuns, the former Beguine, Mechtild of Magdeburg (ca.1208-1282) and Gertrude of Helfta; Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and Franciscan Tertiary, Angela of Foligno (1248-1309); and the Dominican Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). We shall also establish thematic and theologically important continuity by backtracking to explore connections James of Vitry makes to Hugh of St-Victor, in particular, but also to Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, Gregory the Great and Peter Abelard — to name just a few of his many sources.

### *Faith, Simplicity and Rhetoric*

Both Augustine and Origen felt that a prime difference between Christianity and Platonism is the New Testament appeal to simple people.<sup>28</sup> Guibert of Nogent’s advice to twelfth-century preachers when addressing “illiterate and imbecilic men” is that they should leave behind “ornate speech” and instead present “again and again” the “tangible things which they know from experience.”<sup>29</sup> Gregory the Great considered an egalitarian stance towards the audience a basic didactic rule. “True preachers do not only aspire by contemplation to the Holy Head of the

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* 7.9.14 (CCSL 27:101); Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.42 (PG 11:1481).

<sup>29</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* (PL 156:25) “... ornatus necessitati superest, penset eorum qui tacite audient imbecillas vires [elsewhere, illiterati] ... ut rursum cum sermonem facturum est ....”

Church above ... but also descend to its members in pity for them."<sup>30</sup> Observing the early Franciscans firsthand, James of Vitry's comment was:

I believe ... that the Lord wants to save many souls by means of these simple and poor men as a reproach to the prelates who resemble "mute watchdogs unable to bark."<sup>31</sup>

When Brother Bernard goes on an evangelising mission to the "wilderness" of the Italian literary capital of Bologna (the University of Bologna had 10,000 students in 1211),<sup>32</sup> he leaves behind the spoken word altogether and preaches entirely by gesture and act. Compared with the figurative muteness of the learned, the actual muteness of Brother Bernard, who teaches entirely by the "tangible" representation of performative action ("bearing the rule of St. Francis in his heart and practiced in his deeds"), is a simple and more effective means of communicating the apostolic message.<sup>33</sup>

As far back as Athanasius' seminal *Life of St. Anthony*, the rough simplicity and ineloquence with which Divine Scripture had chosen to represent itself in the Gospels was represented in the equal roughness, simplicity and ineloquence of Christian saints. As witnessed in the New Testament, simplicity was the *chosen* means of expression of the most sublime truth. With incredible condescension, Augustine speaks enviously of the simple happiness of a destitute beggar.<sup>34</sup>

Bonaventure relates a story in which Augustine instructs that the summit of Gospel perfection is not taught through eloquence but through the humility exemplified by Job's weeping.<sup>35</sup> In the twelfth century, a debate over the relative merits of the active life of canonical preachers and the reclusive life of monks was expressed in the pejorative image of monks sitting around in their cells

<sup>30</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.5 (Pl. 77:33): "... praedicatores recti non solum sursum sanctum caput Ecclesiae ... contemplando appetunt, sed deorsum quoque ad membra illius miserando descendunt."

<sup>31</sup> James of Vitry, "Epistola prima," in *Lettres de James de Vitry*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens: 75-76, cited in Randolph E. Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 28.

<sup>32</sup> According to Raphael Brown's note in *Omnibus*, p. 1516 n. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Little Flowers* 5 (*Omnibus*, 1313). On the importance of performative spirituality for the Franciscans, see Hester Goodenough Gelber, "A Theatre of Virtue: The Exemplary World of Francis of Assisi" in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratten Hawley, 15-35 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* 6.6.9 (CCSL 27:79).

weeping all day.<sup>36</sup> Faced with this slander, the Cistercian Abbot, Adam of Perseigne, invokes the inviolable authority of simplicity when he counters with his description of the infant Christ's tears as more eloquent than Cicero.<sup>37</sup> It was of course from Cicero himself that medieval teachers of rhetoric inherited the dogma that the effectiveness of good oratory is psychological and emotional, not rational.<sup>38</sup> The idea that something as sophisticated as rhetoric could operate on so simple a basis as emotional triggers truly vindicates the Christian message. James of Vitry himself taught that the aim of good preaching is to emotively "melt hard hearts" with the fire of the Word of God.<sup>39</sup> Emphasising its emotional resonance, Gregory the Great likens good preaching to "the voice of those who weep."<sup>40</sup> Johan Huizinga describes how, when the celebrated Dominican preacher Vincent Ferrer "spoke of the Last Judgement, of Hell, or of the Passion, both he and his hearers wept so copiously that he had to suspend his sermon till the sobbing ceased."<sup>41</sup> The most blatant representation of the Ciceronian commonplace that rhetoric is emotional, not rational, is the common example of a preacher who reduces his audience to tears even though he is speaking a language that is foreign to them and they understand none of his words.<sup>42</sup> Tears were a medieval orator's standing ovation.

Augustine's mother, Monica, is a stereotype of philosophical ignorance and Christian virtue. None too kindly, Edmund Hill comments that Monica embodies:

<sup>35</sup> Bonaventure, *The Disciple and the Master: St. Bonaventure's Sermons on St. Francis of Assisi*, ed. and trans. Eric Doyle (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983), 74.

<sup>36</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Adam of Perseigne, "Epistola 15" (PL 211:630) "ibi Verbum infans vagit quidem in cunis, sed prae Tullii facundia, imo prae eloquiis angelorum, non vagitus est eloquens ...."

<sup>38</sup> Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Late Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (London: Scholar Press, 1988), 49, 137, 144.

<sup>39</sup> James of Vitry, *Sermones feriales et communes* Sermo 8: "Rogate igitur Dominum ut hodie corda dura et ferrea ignis verbi Dei calefaciat ad amorem, candere faciat ad innocentie puritatem, et mollia reddat ad devocionem." In C. Muessig, "Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones feriales et communes*," in *De l'homélie au sermon: Histoire de la prédication médiévale*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse and Xavier Hermand, Actes du Colloque International de Louvain-la-Neuve, 9-11 Juillet, 1992 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'études médiévales de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 1993), 68.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 20.41.78; cited in Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924), 5.

That hoary old theological character, the unlettered charwoman of deep and simple faith, who is too often introduced as an excuse for avoiding or even inhibiting theological thought.<sup>43</sup>

In the letters of Paul, Augustine discovers the "face of devotion" and the "tears of confession" so lacking in the Platonist books.<sup>44</sup> Monica's "face of devotion" is appropriately blemished by her steady flow of tears. Her extraordinary tears "flowed out on to the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed." Monica weeps over her son's sin "out of faith and from the Spirit (Gal. 5.5) ... more than mothers weep over their children's bodily deaths." Her tears birth her son to new life. She receives the prophecy: "It will not be possible that the son of these tears should perish."<sup>45</sup> After his conversion, Augustine describes how his mother's tears and groans on his behalf had turned from mourning into joy (Ps. 29.12). Her maternal expectations were more valuably rewarded by her son's spiritual rebirth than if he had borne grandchildren in the flesh.<sup>46</sup> Monica's tears demonstrate the simplicity and purity of faith. The power of the Spirit that works through such simple signs is represented in the fulfilment of the prophecy that it is these tears that rebirth her son.

Clarissa Atkinson's research has shown how Augustine's description of Monica as the "mother of tears" was used by a number of medieval women, including St. Bridget of Sweden and Margery Kempe, in self-conscious imitation of Monica.<sup>47</sup> Monica's cult was revived in the late twelfth century by James of Vitry's order of Augustinian canons, and Monica is an important model for his

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Giraldus Cambrensis, *De rebus a se gestis*, ed. J. S. Brewer, Rolls Series, vol. 21, in James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin ed., *The Portable Medieval Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin; U.S.A.: Viking, 1977), 353.

<sup>43</sup> Hill in *Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. 5, *Trinity*, p. 392 n. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Conf.* 7.21.27 (CCSL 27:111): "Hoc illae litterae non habent. Non habent illae paginae uultum pietatis huius, lacrimas confessionis, sacrificium tuum, spiritum contribulatum, cor contritum et humiliatum ... poculum pretii nostri."

<sup>45</sup> *Conf.* 3.11.19 (CCSL 27:37): "Cum pro me fleret ad te mea mater, fidelis tua, amplius quam flent matres corpora funera. Uidebat enim illa mortem meam 'ex fide et spiritu' (Gal. 5.5), quem habebat ex te, et exaudisti eam, domine. Exaudisti eam nec despexisti lacrimas eius, cum profluentes rigarent terram sub oculis eius in omni loco orationis eius; exaudisti eam." *Conf.* 3.12.21 (CCSL 27:39): "Fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat" (Cf. Luc. 18.1-8).

<sup>46</sup> *Conf.* 8.12.30 (CCSL 27:132): "Conuertisti luctum eius in gaudium (Ps. 29.12), multo uberius, quam uoluerat, et multo carius ... quam de nepotibus carnis meae requirebat."

<sup>47</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, "Your Servant, My Mother: The Figures of St. Monica in the Ideology of Christian Motherhood," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles, Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series (Boston: Beacon, 1985). Courcelle mentions Guibert de

representation of Marie. Like Monica, Marie's tears are so copious they gush down from her eyes to the ground leaving a saintly trail behind in her footprints. Marie's humble simplicity is represented by James' piteous image of her weeping so often that she needs to constantly dab her eyes with a piece of flaxen cloth from her hat.<sup>48</sup>

Although Marie is not mute and often communicates poignant spiritual "tips" to the men around her, her communicative power as a preacher operates exclusively through her unarguable tears. James of Vitry took Richard of St-Victor's comment that we have "more need of tears than arguments, more need of miracles than proofs" literally.<sup>49</sup> Marie's verbal advice is no match for the extraordinary transformative spiritual power of her flooded and pitiful face itself. Although one needs no education to read her face like a book, she inspires a more meaningful conversion than words in books. The hard heart of a cleric melts away into tears before Marie:

When he bravely fixed his eyes on the face of the handmaid of Christ, his mind was suddenly and marvellously transformed, and he dissolved into a great flood of tears so that for a long time afterwards he could scarcely be moved from the place and from her presence ... and after many sighs and tears he said, "Now through my own experience, I have received God's power (*virtutem*) from this holy woman."<sup>50</sup>

In another version, a priest is celebrating Mass when suddenly, prompted by his interaction earlier that day with Marie, "the Lord opened and none shut" (Is. 22.22) and "he sent forth waters and they overturned the earth." (Job 12.15) The priest's "spirit was drowned with such a flood of tears that he almost suffocated." The more he tried to repress the intensity of his tears, the more he was drenched with them. His tears were so excessive that they soaked through the priest's book

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Nogent's use of Monica as a model in his autobiography, *De vita sua* (1115); Courcelle, "Confessions" dans la tradition littéraire, 274-75.

<sup>48</sup> *VMO* 1.1.18 (551): "Cum autem per dies et noctes continue exitus aquarum deducerent oculi eius, et lacrimae eius non solum in maxillis eius: sed ne in ecclesiae pavimento lutum ex lacrimis relinquerent lineo quo caput tegebat panno excipiebatur. Multis talibus utebatur velaminibus, quae frequenter permutare oportebat, dum siccum humido succedebat."

<sup>49</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De arca mystica* 4.6 (PL 196:139): "Puto ergo quia opus est in hoc opere intima potius compunctione, quam profunda investigatione, suspiriis quam argumentis, crebris potius gemitibus quam copiosis argumentationibus."

<sup>50</sup> *VMO* 1.4.39 (556): "Cumque forte in vultum ancillae Christi oculos figeret, subdito et mirabiliter mutatus animo, in tantam lacrimarum copiam resolutus est, quod vix longo tempore post a loco et ab eius praesentia potuit amoveri ... post multa suspiria et lacrimas dicens ... 'nunc autem in hac sancta muliere virtutem Dei per experientiam percepi.'"

and altercloth, signifying, Marie instructs him, that “you have learned though your own experience that it is not within human power to resist the blowing spirit of the South Wind.” In drenching his books, his real tears reveal the tangible Spirit in a way that words in books fail to do.<sup>51</sup>

*Affectus locutus est, non intellectus*

The Latin word *infantia* is defined as the “inability to speak,” as well as “infancy.”<sup>52</sup> In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his state of *infantia*:

Since my desires were inside me and those to whom I wished to express them were outside ... I used to jerk my limbs about and make various noises trying to turn the signs I was making into something similar to my wishes. And, although I tried as much as I was able, I was not very able and they were not very similar.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine describes his difficulty in communicating as an infant, before he was able to verbalise, as a problem of how to “make signs similar to his wishes.” A fundamental point of Augustine’s semiology is that the purpose of signs is to represent the will. Signs are the medium into which human desire is channelled — albeit sometimes unsuccessfully, as the example of the frustrated infant demonstrates. Augustine’s observations of infancy reveal the purpose of signs in its transparency. The infant may not always communicate successfully, or get what it wants with its communication, but at least the source of its motivation in its own desire is patently clear. Augustine seems almost to covet the uninhibited

<sup>51</sup> *VMO* 1.1.17 (551): “Cum igitur Sacerdos ille die eodem Missam celebraret, aperuit Dominus, et non fuit qui clauderet (Is. 22.22), emisit aquas, et subverterunt terram (Job 12.15). Tanto enim lacrimarum diluvio submersus est spiritus eius quod fere suffocatus est: quantoque reprimere impetum conabatur, tanto magis lacrimarum imbre, non solum ipse, set et liber et altaris linteamini rigabantur .... ‘Nunc,’ inquit [Marie], ‘per experientiam didicisti, quod non est in homine impetum spiritus Austro flante retinere.’” For a story with a similar theme see Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Fliesse: de Licht* 3.17 (Morel, 79).

<sup>52</sup> Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); The Latin word *infantia* derives from the Greek, *aphatos*, speechless, from which we have the English word aphasia. My thanks to Anne Taylor for pointing out the Greek and English etymology.

<sup>53</sup> *Conf.* 1.6.8 (CCSL 27:4): “... et uoluntates meas uolebam ostendere eis, per quos implerentur, et non poteram, quia illae intus erant, foris autem illi ... itaque iactabam et membra et uoces, signa similia uoluntatibus meis, pauca quae poteram, qualia poteram: non enim erant ueri similia.”

infant, who does not know when he is acting in a reprehensible manner. His *infantia*, or non-verbal status, means that he is unable “to understand the person who admonished him” because neither custom nor reason allow him to be reprehended.<sup>54</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, as we have seen, makes much of the ideal of the freedom of *infantia*. For Bernard, the uninhibited connection between desire and body language represents a freedom of spirit that cannot and should not be tethered by law — not even by the tiresome rules of grammar.<sup>55</sup> In a hilarious passage, Bernard extols the virtues of burping as exemplary of Christian freedom:

What rules or regulations do you impose on a burp? They do not admit of your control, or wait for you to compose them, nor do they consult your leisure or convenience. They burst forth from within without your will or knowledge, torn from you rather than uttered. But a burp gives out an odor, sometimes good sometimes bad, according to the quality of the vessel they come from. Now a “good man out of his good treasure brings forth good things, and an evil man evil things!” (Matth. 12.35)<sup>56</sup>

In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates famously argues with Simmias over whether or not body and soul coexist in a relationship of harmony or of subjugation. When Simmias demonstrates psychosomatic harmony through the example of a lyre and its music, Socrates counters with his notorious master/slave imagery.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, it is undoubtably with this famous dispute in mind that Christians like Augustine and Bernard describe the psychosomatic unity represented in Christ as a harmony. One can see that body and soul are in tune — for example — in the way in which they mutually respond to music. Augustine describes how he wept and was deeply moved by God’s hymns and songs.

The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled in my heart. This caused the feelings of devotion to overflow. Tears ran, and it was good for me to have that experience.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Conf.* 1.7.11 (CCSL 27:6); quoted in full above p. 46 n. 89.

<sup>55</sup> *SC* 67.2.3 (SBO 2:190).

<sup>56</sup> *SC* 67.3.4 (SBO 2:191): “Quas tu tuo ructui leges imponis vel regulas? Non recipit tuam moderationem, non a te compositionem expectat, non commoditatem, non opportunitatem requirit. Per se ex intimis, non modo cum non vis, sed et cum nescis, erumpit, evulsus potius quam emissis. Tamen odorem portat ructus, quandoque bonum, quandoque malum, pro vasorum, e quibus ascendit, contrariis qualitibus. Denique ‘bonus homo de bono thesauro suo profert bonum, et malus malum’ (Matth. 12.35). Trans. Edmonds, *Song*, 4:7-8.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 86-95.

<sup>58</sup> *Conf.* 9.6.14 (CCSL 27:141): “Voces illae influebant auribus meis et eliquabatur ueritas in cor meum et exaestuabat inde affectus pietatis, et currebant lacrimae, et bene mihi erat cum eis.” Trans. Chadwick, 164.

Origen says that the spirit “does not know how to express its movements in words, because the Word in you cannot carry the inexpressible and divine meaning of the Spirit — then you are singing praise to God.”<sup>59</sup> Bernard reiterates this theme when he declares that: “It is alright to surrender our mind in voice of praise and thanks.”<sup>60</sup> These examples of non-verbal yet harmonic responses of body and soul to the spirit of music and song demonstrate both the anti-dualism of Christian orthodoxy and the unregulated freedom of the Christian way through faith, not law. The body does not “obey” the heart when it is moved to tears by music; instead, body and soul seem to be working together in perfect concord. Like an infant or the man who burps, the soul makes uninhibited use of signs to express its desires. And, in harmony with the Spirit, there can be no faulting its expression.

For Richard of St-Victor, the prime example of the harmony between his inner self, Adam, and his body, Eve, is weeping. “What, I ask, are more dissimilar in the nature of things than spirit and body? Yet where, I beg you, do we find so much unanimity of such perfect *harmony*?” When the inner person, Adam, refreshes himself with the food of the “bread of grief” (Ps. 41.4; Ps. 126.2), so that he “groans deeply” and “the outer person [Eve] sheds tears abundantly on account of his groaning,” then “he is truly able to *sing* about it: ‘Who together with me took sweet foods’” (Ps. 54.15).<sup>61</sup>

St. Francis writes, “Their words may be in harmony with their hearts and their hearts with God.”<sup>62</sup> James of Vitry quotes David, the patron saint of music, saying that “My heart and my body have exalted in the True God.”<sup>63</sup> Emphasising the true spontaneity of Marie’s psychosomatic enjoyment of David’s Psalms, reminiscent of Bernard’s humour, James describes how Marie props up

<sup>59</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Psalms* frag. 80.1; trans. Daly/von Balthasar, *Origen*, 107.

<sup>60</sup> SC 56.3.7 (SBO 2:118): “... libet animum laxare in vocem laudis et gratiarum.”

<sup>61</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De arca mystica* 2.17 (PL 196: 97-98): “Quid, quaeso, in rerum natura dissimilius quam spiritus et corpus? Verumtamen ubi, obsecro, tantam tam perfectae concordiae unanimitatem ... cum interior homo profunde ingemiscit, et ad eius gemitum exterior homo ubertim lacrymas fundit ... potest de eo veraciter psallere: ‘Qui mecum dulces capiebat cibos’” (Ps. 54.15). Trans. Zinn, 201-02.

<sup>62</sup> Francis of Assisi, “Letter to a General Chapter,” *Omnibus*, 107. On the relationship between hearts and speech see Giles Constable, “The Concern for Sincerity and Understanding in Liturgical Prayer, Especially in the Twelfth Century,” in *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, 71-152 (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1996).

her Psalter before her and sweetly *burps* forth Psalms to the Lord.<sup>64</sup> Marie shows “her affectivity through the office of the mouth of the heart.”<sup>65</sup> Like Richard’s description of how the special concordance between inner and outer man is exemplified in weeping, the relationship between the thoughts in Marie’s heart and the devotion flowing from her eyes is porous: “As often as God was in her heart through thought, a river of tears flowed from her eyes through devotion.”<sup>66</sup>

Jean Leclercq describes how Benedictine culture encouraged a psychosomatic notion of learning in favour of more rationalist approaches. The idea that learning engages heart, soul and body came to be represented in the commonplace play on the Latin words for melody (*melos*) and honey (*mel*). Emphasising the sensual nature of spiritual communication, monastic tradition characterised the “melody of a voice” (*melos*) as analogous to the “sweet taste of honey” (*mel*).<sup>67</sup> Citing Bernard of Clairvaux, Gertrude of Helfta describes Jesus as “the honey in the mouth, the melody in the ear and the jubilation in the heart.”<sup>68</sup> James imagines the honey of Marie’s heart overflowing from her mouth and drawing out not words, but tears. “From the honeycomb of the many spiritual sweetnesses in her heart, a savour of honey overflowed perceptively in her mouth, drawing forth sweet tears.”<sup>69</sup>

Catherine of Siena creates a wonderfully innovative version of this theme. Like Richard of St-Victor and James of Vitry, she sees the harmony of body and soul most aptly represented in tears. Because there is “no other bodily member that can satisfy the heart as the eyes can. If the heart is sad the eyes show it .... Tears are the messenger that lets you know whether life or death is in the heart.”

<sup>63</sup> *VMO* Prol. 7 (548): “... sicut David ... ‘Cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum verum.’ For a fascinating treatment of the significance of the notion of harmony within the “mourning to joy” theme in relation to the cult of David see Connolly, *Mourning to Joy*, chapter four.

<sup>64</sup> *VMO* 1.3.26 (553): “... psalterium ante se positum habebat, ex quo Psalmos Domino suaviter eructabant.”

<sup>65</sup> *VMO* 1.3.25 (552): “... oris officio cordis exprimendo affectum.”

<sup>66</sup> *VMO* Prol. 6 (548): “... quoties Deus erat in corde per cogitationem, lacrimarum rivulus ab oculis fluebat per devotionem .... [et Sancto fluminis impetu totam Dei Civitatem lactificabant (Ps. 45.5)].”

<sup>67</sup> Leclercq, introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Gertrude, *Legatus* 1.2 (SC 127:122); Bernard of Clairvaux, *SC* 15.3.6 (SBO 1:86). Cf., *VMO* 2.5.43 (557): “Christus erat ei meditatio in corde, verbum in ore, exemplum in opere.”

<sup>69</sup> *VMO* Prol. 6 (548): “Multis etiam ex favo spiritualis dulcedinis in corde, redundabat mellis sapor sensibiliter in ore, dulces lacrimas eliciens, et mentem in devotione conservans.” Cf., Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Fliessende Licht* 4.3 (Morel, 97).

But, touching on the nature of the moral freedom achieved through the Incarnation, in Catherine's version, the eyes do not merely passively respond to the movement of the heart. Instead, just as God wins humanity back to him through the freedom of their voluntary pity for Christ, so Catherine's heart must win back her eyes by evoking their compassion. Attributing volition to the eyes themselves, she describes how "her eyes want to satisfy her heart." And she explains how, "When her heart is sad, her eyes, sensing the heart's pain and sadness, at once begin to weep in tender self-pity."<sup>70</sup>

### *Penitential Rebirth*

Truly, Lord, you are a mother;  
For both they who are in labour  
And they who are brought forth  
Are accepted by you.

You have died more than they, that they may labour to bear.  
It is by your death that they have been born,  
For if you had not been in labour;  
You could not have borne death.  
And if you had not died, you would not have brought forth.  
For longing to bear sons into life  
You tasted of death,  
And by dying you begot them ....  
So you, Lord God, are the Great Mother.

Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Paul"<sup>71</sup>

Genesis 3.16: To the woman he said,  
"I will greatly multiply your pain in child-bearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children."

<sup>70</sup> Catherine of Siena, *Il Dialogo* 89; translated in Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Susan Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 289.

<sup>71</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad sanctum Paulum* (Oratio 10) (SAO 3:40): "Vere, domine, et tu mater. Nam et quod alii parturierunt et pepererunt, a te acceperunt. Tu prius illos et quod pepererunt parturiendo mortuus es et moriendo peperisti. Nam nisi parturisse, mortem non sustinuisses; et nisi mortuus esses, non peperisses. Desiderio enim gignendi filios ad vitam mortem gustasti, et moriens genuisti .... Ergo tu, domine deus, magis mater." Trans. Ward, 153.

An ancient archetype connecting suffering and the production of new life with maternal labour is strongly represented throughout the Hebrew Bible. Ambivalently, Genesis blesses Eve with the title "Mother of All Living" (Gen. 3.20) and curses her with pain in childbirth (Gen. 3.16). Just as the earth was originally formed (Gen. 1) and re-formed (Gen. 6-9) out of a body of water, so Jeremiah and Joel describe how the grounds and fields themselves mourn in hope of fertilising and renewing rains (Jer. 12.10-11; Joel 1.10).<sup>72</sup> In Isaiah, God himself suffers a woman's travail. God the Mother cries out like a woman in labour, gasping and panting, causing destruction and "drying up the pools." Her waters pour out on the thirsty land, and Israel's descendants "spring up like grass amid waters, like willows by flowing streams" (Is. 42.14-15; 44.3-4). As a Mother, God's joy at new life is coupled with the pain of "bringing forth," and this is manifest in the world's barrenness and fertility, her Edens and wastelands, her deserts and gardens.

In the Hebrew Bible, there are many suffering mothers: the earth, Eve, Sarah and Rachel, Israel, the Daughters of Jerusalem, even Hebrew kings and God himself. Recalling these origins, Marie says that the Book of Lamentations precedes her when she weeps for her sins.<sup>73</sup> In Lamentations and other Prophetic books of the Bible, the Prophets call upon the people of Israel to come together and mourn "like a woman in childbirth" (e.g., Is. 26.16-19; Jer. 4.31) and "like a woman at the death of an only son" (Jer. 6.26; Amos 8.10). Through the mediation of a woman's travail, this collective penance rebirths Israel, cleansing her of sin and of the influences of foreign cults to which she has sold herself "like a whore." James of Vitry fashions Marie into a penitent in the ancient mode. When "heretic demons" enter the village of Manne, Marie cried out "like a woman in childbirth" so that "you would have thought her wounded with sorrow."<sup>74</sup> When she passes through the middle of Nivelles, Marie remembered the sin of the worldly townspeople and she "conceived in her heart such an indignation and abomination that she began to cry out for sorrow." Making cuts in the soles of her feet "she could scarcely find rest until she had struck her feet

<sup>72</sup> McEntire lists examples of imagery of the "mourning land" in the Prophetic books: Jer. 9.10; 4.28; Os. 4.3; Amos 1.2; *Doctrine of Compunction*, 12-13.

<sup>73</sup> *VMO* 2.12.102 (570): "Praecesserunt Lamentationes, dum lugerem pro peccatis ...."

many times upon the ground.”<sup>75</sup> Marie’s penitential display invokes the millennium-old importance of rites of public penance in Christianity, which themselves harken back through Hebrew penitential rites to ancient pagan mourning and cleansing rituals. Marie’s tears and blood offer healing and a chance of renewal and rebirth to grounds desecrated by heresy.

Isaiah 66.7: Before she was in labour she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such a thing?

In Mary, Eve’s curse is much ameliorated. Bernard of Clairvaux describes the birth of the Word in Mary as “a truly voluntary rain” (Ps. 67.10) which “fell gently and quietly into the virgin womb.”<sup>76</sup> When James presents Marie of Oignies in the mode of a traditional penitent and mourner, he emphasises the suffering and sacrifice of her maternal flesh. When he insinuates her closeness to the Virgin, he describes the soft gentleness of Marie’s birth of tears. One day, when he was feeling affectionate compassion for Marie, a priest asks her “If she ever felt any ache or pain in her head after such long fasts, after so many vigils and after such inundations of tears and after her head had been so emptied?”

Ordinary tears were thought to dry up, but Marie replies:

These tears are my refreshment both day and night (Ps. 1.2), they are my bread. They do not afflict my head but rather they feed the mind. They torture with no pain and they cheer the soul with a certain serenity. They do not deplete the brain but make the soul replete, softening the soul with a certain unction when they are not wrenched through violence but are freely given as a drink by the Lord.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *VMO* 2.6.56 (560): “... more parturientis quandoque clamabat. Quanto putas vulnerata est dolore ....” See also *VMO* 1.2.19 (551).

<sup>75</sup> *VMO* 2.7.67 (564): “... per medium Nivellae transiens, reduxit post haec ad memoriam peccata et abominationes, quas in villa illa faciunt frequenter seculares; tantamque indignationem et abominationem concepit in corde, quod prae dolore coepit clamare; quaesito cultello ab ancilla sua ... volebat cutem a pedibus suis rescare ... vix tandem cum multotiens pedes ad terram collisisset, potuit quiescere.” Trans. King, 83.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *In laudibus Virginis Matris* 2.7 (SBO 4: 25-26): “Pluvia nempe voluntaria (Ps. 67.10), placide ... se quietissimo ... virginem demisit in uterum ....”

<sup>77</sup> *VMO* 1.1.18 (551): “Dam vero compatiens affectus ... quaererem utrum exinanito ... capite aliquam sentiret laesionem vel dolorem; Hae, inquit, lacrimae sunt refectio mea, hae sunt mihi panes die ac nocte; quae caput non affligunt, sed mentem pascunt; nullo dolore torquent, sed animam quadam serenitate exhilarant; non cerebrum evacuant, sed animam satietate replent, et suavi quadam unctione mulcent; dum per violentiam non extorquentur, sed sponte a Domino propinantur.” Trans. King, 34. Monastic tradition going back to the desert fathers taught that tears provided for both the health and salvation of the soul; in Latin this was emphasised through the

Like Bernard's descriptions of the gentle and truly free birth of the Word in the Virgin, Marie's tears "are not wrenched through violence but are freely given as a drink by the Lord." Anselm of Canterbury describes humanity as created by God the Father and re-created through Mary our Mother.<sup>78</sup> In another description of Marie's painless gift of tears, James adds that Marie's tears not only renew, they also miraculously "re-create" her body.<sup>79</sup>

Differentiating Marie's weeping from that of an ordinary penitent, James explains that her perpetual grief does not result from repentance over her sinfulness. Gregory the Great taught that a penitent becomes all the "more blameless the more he blames himself."<sup>80</sup> James describes how, "since it is the way with good people to find fault where there is none," Marie would "throw herself at the feet of priests, accusing herself with tears and making confession."<sup>81</sup> Marie weeps compulsively although she is without apparent sin.<sup>82</sup>

As we saw in chapter two, Anselm of Canterbury taught that the Virgin Mary was conceived and born in sin but was later entirely purified by the ardency of her faith.<sup>83</sup> In his influential prayers, Anselm demonstrates that "ardency of faith" by the Virgin's extraordinary grief at the crucifixion. Fountains flowed from her pure eyes. An incomparable flood drenched her matchless face when she beheld her son, her God and her Lord hung before her on the cross.<sup>84</sup> Alongside the important theological role he assigns to Mary as the redemptress and mother

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double meaning of the word *salus*. See Hausherr, *Penthos*, 32-33. On the common view that tears dry up and the difficulties maintaining "perpetual penitence," see Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum caritatis* 2.6 (PL 195:531); Catherine of Siena, *Il Dialogo* 88; trans. Noffke, 161.

<sup>78</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad sanctam Mariam* (Oratio 7) (SAO 3:22): "Deus igitur est pater rerum creatarum, et Maria mater rerum recreatarum."

<sup>79</sup> *VMO* Prol. 6 (548): "... corpus etiam mirabiliter recreabant."

<sup>80</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Job* 21.5.10 (CCSL 143A:1071-72), cited in Straw, *Gregory*, 232. Straw explains that Gregory "proposes the ideal of the just penitent, who in his actions shuns even what is lawful, and in his penitence laments even the slightest sin with abundant tears"; *Gregory*, 232. See also Bernard of Clairvaux, *SC* 45.2.3 (SBO 2:51-52).

<sup>81</sup> *VMO* 1.2.19 (551): "Et quoniam bonarum mentium est, ibi culpam agnoscere, ubi culpa non est; Sacerdotum pedibus frequenter advoluta, quaedam cum lacrimis accusando se confitebatur."

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, "Deum testem invoco, numquam in tota eius vita seu conversatione vel unum percipere potui peccatum mortale."

<sup>83</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *De conceptu* 19 (SAO 2:160) see above p. 78 n. 59.

<sup>84</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervere* (Oratio 2) (SAO 3:7-8); see above p. 74 n. 49.

of the “re-created” human race,<sup>85</sup> Anselm also presents the Virgin as a model of personal salvation through penitence.

As we have seen, Anselm fosters a strong identification with the Virgin in the person praying. He invokes even more feeling for Mary’s grief for her son than for Christ’s grief on his own behalf. This is conventional to the Eastern tradition of Marian laments, in which the human reaction to the terrible event of crucifixion is all Mary’s. By the thirteenth century, this identification with the Virgin had taken hold of the devout. Mechtild of Magdeburg worships Mary as the “mother of many” who is “desolate” and “wretched” under the cross.<sup>86</sup> Angela of Foligno describes how the Virgin “bewails her sweet son more deeply than did any other creature.”<sup>87</sup> In Anselm’s prayers, whilst we feel for Mary in her grief, our own grief is more complicated than the fountains that freely flow from her pure eyes. We cannot grieve so easily, because our grief is burdened by our guilt. Thus, at the same time as we identify with Mary we are also distanced from her, knowing that she is in the enviable position of being able to grieve without feeling responsible. Anselm asks us, “Why we were not there with Mary? ... Why we did not weep?” The more we feel love and pity for Christ and Mary, the more we hate ourselves for being the cause of their suffering. Our recognition of the goodness in them provokes a sense of the lack of goodness in ourselves. In chapter two, I described this guilt as a “shadow of goodness.” Since it is combined with our awareness of guilt, it is not the pure goodness of a truly innocent soul, but only the shadowy goodness of the sinful soul who repents. Yet in this guilty repentance we come as close to imitating Mary’s grief as it is possible for us to come.

In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard formatively defines “fruitful repentance” as a repentance which proceeds:

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<sup>85</sup> E.g., Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad sanctam Mariam* (Oratio 7) (SAO 3:22): “Deus igitur est pater rerum creaturarum, et Maria mater rerum recreatarum .... Maria peperit illum per quem cuncta sunt salvata.”

<sup>86</sup> Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Fliessende Licht* 1.22 (Morel, 12).

<sup>87</sup> Angela of Foligno, *Book of Divine Consolation* 2.13; Translated in Angela of Foligno, *The Book of Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*, trans. Mary G. Steegmann (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), 77.

From the love of God rather than from fear, with the result that we are sorry to have offended or to have shown contempt of God because he is good rather than because he is just.<sup>88</sup>

Abelard's influential definition reworks the fundamental tenets of Anselm's soteriology. Like Anselm, Abelard distinguishes between an obedient offering to God (proceeding from fear and in accordance to justice) and a free gift (proceeding from love and in accordance with goodness). And, also like Anselm, Abelard views guilt as the means of satisfaction. In our guilt — not over our own sin and for our own sakes, but over the harm that sin does to Christ — we demonstrate the goodness of love. In Anselm's prayers this sense of guilt is provoked by the love and identification the penitent feels for Mary. It is guilt not out of wrongdoing alone, but out of an awareness of the harm that wrongdoing has caused to those we love — to Mary and Christ. Abelard views this awareness of guilt as the means to make repentance to God in a way that proceeds from love rather than fear. Fruitful repentance comes from our feeling "sorry to have offended or to have shown contempt" for God's goodness.

Anselm wishes to be "thrown at the feet of Christ our mother." As a penitent he imagines himself "fleeing in terror from the dread of Your justice to the comfort of your mercy,"<sup>89</sup> and it is at the foot of Christ his mother that he finally casts himself. Or rather, he wants Paul — his true spiritual mother in these matters — to be the one to throw his dead body "into the heart of Christ's goodness" so that Christ, his merciful mother, will give life to her son.<sup>90</sup> Anselm's unburdening his sinful self at the bosom of God's kindness is similar to what Abelard defines as:

<sup>88</sup> Abelard, *Ethica* "De fructuosa penitentia" (Luscombe, 84): "... penitentia salubris et ex amore Dei potius quam ex timore proveniens, manifeste declarat ut videlicet doleamus Deum offendisse vel contempsisse quia est bonus magis quam quia iustus est." Trans. Luscombe, 85.

<sup>89</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Deploratio virginitatis male amissae* (SAO 3:83): "Fugit enim exterrita terrente iustitia tua ad confortantem misericordiam tuam."

<sup>90</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio ad sanctum Paulum* (Oratio 10) (SAO 3:41): "Paule mater, et te ipse genuit. Pone ergo mortuum filium tuum ante pedes Christi, matris tuae, quia filius eius es. Immo iacta illum in sinum pietatis eius ... Insta ergo ut anima mortua, quam tu vivam peperisti, vitae restituatur ...."

A truly fruitful repentance for sin, since this sorrow and contrition of mind proceeds from love of God, whom we consider to be so kind, rather than from fear of punishments.<sup>91</sup>

In his *Cur Deus homo?* Anselm shows that Christ demonstrates a Christian path to freedom through love. I argued that Anselm complements his model of Christ in the *CDH* with the model of the penitent in his prayers. An imitation that was implicit in Anselm's prayers is explicit in Abelard's penitential doctrine. Abelard's doctrine of penitence through guilt became the basis for twelfth- and thirteenth-century intellectual enthusiasm for contrition. Following Abelard, "contritionists," as Thomas Tentler calls them, went so far as to assert that sincere contrition was all that a penitent required for absolution before God.<sup>92</sup> This is Abelard's formulation of the power of contrition:

With this sigh and contrition of heart which we call true repentance sin does not remain, that is, the contempt of God or consent to evil, because the charity of God which inspires this sigh does not put up with fault. In this sigh we are instantly reconciled to God and we gain pardon for the preceding sin, according to the Prophet: "In what hour soever the sinner shall sigh, he shall be saved" (Ezek. 33.12), that is, he will be made worthy of the salvation of his soul.<sup>93</sup>

Abelard's doctrine of penitence as an act of liberating love of Christ became archetypally fixed in the scene of the devout penitent-come-saint before the crucifix. In this regard, James of Vitry's text may have been a prototype. Abelard taught that there are two types of tears: a lesser type that corresponds to fear over a sin committed; and tears that address the constitutional state of the soul by expressing guilt over the harm that sin causes to Christ our Saviour. James is categorical that Marie's weeping does not result from a particular sin she has committed. It is not, therefore, penitential in the limited sense of Abelard's

<sup>91</sup> Abelard, *Ethica* "De fructuosa penitentia" (Luscombe, 88): "Et haec quidem reuera fructuosa est penitentia peccati, cum hic dolor atque contritio animi ex amore Dei, quem tam benignum adtendimus, potius quam ex timore penarum procedit." Trans. Luscombe, 89.

<sup>92</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 18-27. Mary Mansfield questions the application of penitential theory to penitential practice, arguing that public penance (rather than private contrition or confession) remained common in France throughout the thirteenth century; *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> Abelard, *Ethica* "De fructuosa penitentia" (Luscombe, 88): "Cum hoc autem gemitu et contritione cordis, quam veram penitentiam dicimus, peccatum non permanet, hoc est, contemptus Dei sive consensus in malum, quia karitas Dei hunc gemitum inspirans non patitur culpam. In hoc statim gemitu Deo reconciliamur et precedentis peccati veniam assequimur, iuxta illud Prophetiae, 'Quaecumque hora peccator ingemuerit, saluus erit' (Ezek. 33.12), hoc est, salute animae suae dignus efficietur." Trans. Luscombe, 89.

first form of tears. Marie's tears are not "wrenched through violence but are freely given by the Lord." Just as Abelard directs, Marie weeps when she "considered the benefits which you mercifully caused to be born in humanity," and elsewhere, "When she directs her attention to how great he was who endured such degradation for us."<sup>94</sup> Gratitude is combined with guilt in Marie's sweet sorrow. Considering Christ's endurance, "Her sorrow was renewed and new tears were revived in her soul through her sweet compunction."<sup>95</sup> Because of its value as a prototype, Marie's whole scene before the crucifix is worth quoting at length:

One day, as she was considered the benefits which you mercifully caused to be born in humanity, she was anticipated and visited by you. So much grace of compunction and so many copious tears were pressed out by the winepress of your cross in the passion that her tears flowed so abundantly that her footprints, copiously overflowing with tears, appeared across the floor of the church. Wherefore for a long time after this visitation she could neither gaze at an image of the Cross nor speak nor hear other people speaking about the Passion of Christ without collapsing into ecstasy from a defect of the heart.<sup>96</sup>

In Thomas Celano's version of Francis' famous conversion scene in the Church of St. Damian, Francis is meditating on a crucifix with the identical result that: "He was unable to restrain himself from grief when he thought about the wounds of Christ which, henceforth, often occupied his mind."<sup>97</sup> This account shares Marie's lack of self-restraint, her reflection on Christ's suffering and the lasting effects of the experience. While she is meditating on the crucifix, Marie's Beguine contemporary, Odilia of Liège (d. 1220), dissolves into tears. From these tears her soul is wiped clean and she regains her innocence and lost virginity.<sup>98</sup> Mechtild of Magdeburg describes how she saves one thousand souls with the

<sup>94</sup> *VMO* 1.1.16 (550-51): "... beneficia, quae tu in carne humano generi clemens exhibuisti, consideraret." *VMO* 1.1.16 (551): "Nam cum attenderet quantus fuit, qui tam abjecta pro nobis sustinuit ... dolor renovabatur ...."

<sup>95</sup> *VMO* 1.1.16 (551): "... rursus dolor renovabatur, novisque lacrimis anima eius dulci compunctione innovabatur."

<sup>96</sup> *VMO* 1.1.16 (550-51): "Dum enim quadam die, praeventa et visitata a te, beneficia, quae tu in carne humano generi clemens exhibuisti, consideraret; tantam compunctionis gratiam, tantam lacrimarum copiam, in torculari tuae Crucis expressam, in passione tua adinvenit, quod vestigia eius per ecclesiam, lacrimae super parvimentum copiose defluentes ostendebant. Unde longe tempore post hanc eius visitationem, nec Crucis imaginem intueri, nec loqui, vel alios loquentes audire poterat de passione Christi, quin ex defectus cordis in extasim laberetur."

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Celano, *Vita Secunda* 1.6.10-11; cited in Daniel, *Franciscan Concept of Mission*, 48. Cf. Angela of Foligno, *Divine Consolation* Prol. 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Vitae B. Odiliae Viduae Leodiensis*, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 13 (1844), n. 11, pp. 214-15; cited in Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 18.

“love-tears” that flow “from the eyes of her body.”<sup>99</sup> Mechtild defines “love-sorrow” in Abelardian fashion:

She is much more sorry over an insult to God than over her misfortune or her own heavy heart. She would rather go with her body and soul to eternal hell than sadden her lover with a serious sin. This love-sorrow makes people on the earth holy and perfect and raises them up before God in heaven.<sup>100</sup>

Angela of Foligno’s description movingly emphasises the soul’s self-accusation:

The soul recognises that it hath itself been the only cause of such great and sublime suffering as Christ Jesus did bear for its sake, and reflecteth upon the infinitude of the divine goodness which for the sake of so vile a creature died to abase itself that it became mortal man and was tormented with great and immeasurable suffering — and this not only once, but continually the while He did live — and how in the end He who was the creator of heaven and earth was willing to die a shameful death, when the soul perceiveth and understandeth this it is itself overwhelmed with grief — and the more clearly it doth perceive, and the more profoundly it doth consider, the more it is moved unto yet greater grief.<sup>101</sup>

### *Marie as Sacrament*

Echoing Abelard’s doctrine of fruitful repentance, James turns Marie’s tears into the cleansing medium for her immaculacy. In her immaculacy she becomes, like the Virgin Mary, a pure vehicle for the reception of Spirit. This is Marie’s most important role: to be a living mother to the Word. Like the Virgin and Christ, Marie embodies the Word made flesh.

Unlike physical insemination through seed, Hugh of St-Victor describes how the Virgin Mary conceived Christ through holy love. As his brides, Marie and the holy women of Liège should serve Christ spiritually “just as” they had served their husbands in the flesh.<sup>102</sup> The jargon of Hugh of St-Victor’s

<sup>99</sup> Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Fliessende Licht* 2.8 (Morel, 35-36).

<sup>100</sup> *Fliessende Licht* 5.1 (Morel, 128): “Ir ist vil leider gotz smacheit deñe ir schade oder ir herzeleit. Si woltte öch lieber mit lip und mit sele zü der ewigen helle varn, eb si irn lieben mit einer höptsünde wölte betrüben. Dis miäerüwe heliget und machet vollekomen lüte in ertrich und höhet si in himelriche vor gotte.” Trans. Tobin, 179.

<sup>101</sup> Angela of Foligno, *Divine Consolation* 2.5; trans. Steegmann, 43-44.

<sup>102</sup> *VMO* Prol. 3 (547): “Domino servientes, sicut maritis suis prius placere nitebantur in carne, imo ita amplius Sponso coelesti placere studebant in spiritu ....” *The Scripta Leonis* 27 (Brooke, 136-39) tells a story of a chaste marriage. *Scripta Leonis* 34 (Brooke, 149) describes: “... mulieres

authoritative *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* describes the Virgin Mary as the paramount example of the “work” wrought in “nature” as an “effect” of an immanent “substance.” Mary conceives through the love and the “operation” of the Holy Spirit in her Virgin flesh.<sup>103</sup> On account of the singular ardency of her love, the Holy Spirit “worked marvellous things in her flesh.”<sup>104</sup>

Like the Virgin Mary, the Spirit produces manifestations in Marie of Oignies’ flesh through a powerful love. As soon as the Spirit is in Marie’s heart through love, tears flow from her eyes. In the flesh of the Virgin, Hugh teaches, the *virtues* of the Holy Spirit worked marvellous things. James describes how, reading Marie as if she were a book, people are “spiritually refreshed” by her appearance. They are “stirred to devotion and to tears” and they “know that *virtue* came from her.” The priest whom Marie dramatically converts realises, through his own experience, that the virtue of God resides in this holy woman.

Hugh describes the reception of the Eucharistic host as a transformation from flesh to spirit: “Christ moves from the mouth to the heart.”<sup>105</sup> But the host has quite another effect on the holy women of Liège: “While the meat of the True lamb filled them, a wondrous savour overflowed from the palate of the heart to the palate of the body.”<sup>106</sup> Where Hugh is concerned to show that the effects of the Spirit in the material world result in an inner transformation, James of Vitry wants to show off the demonstrable external effects of the Spirit. In a characterisation of Beguine women studied in Bynum’s *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Marie does not just receive the bread of Christ’s body, her body is itself that self-same host.

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multe servabant virginitatem suam, permanentes in domibus suis indute pannis religionis.” On this theme in the twelfth-century *Life of St. Alexis* see Karl D. Uitti, *Story, Myth and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry, 1050-1200* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 24. Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 157.

<sup>103</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De sacramentis Christianae fidei* 2.1.8 (PL 176:393): “Conceptit ergo Maria de Spiritu Sancto, non quod de substantia Spiritus Sancti semen partus acceperit, sed quia per amorem et operationem Spiritus Sancti, ex carne virginis divino partui natura substantiam ministravit.”

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, “Nam quia in corde eius amor Spiritus sancti singulariter ardebat, ideo in carne eius virtus Spiritus sancti mirabilia faciebat.”

<sup>105</sup> *De sacramentis* 2.8.13 (PL 176:471): “... deinceps corporalis praesentia quaerenda non est, sed spiritualis retinenda. Christus de ore ad cor transit. [Melius est tibi ut ea in mentem tuam, quam in ventrem tuum.]”

<sup>106</sup> *VMO* Prol. 8 (548): “... dum carnes veri Agni a faucibus cordis, quas replebant, usque ad fauces corporis mirabili sapore redundabant.” Trans. King, 22.

The effective Spirit plays Marie's body like an instrument and the immediate, uncontrollable and spontaneous concordance between her mind and her body is demonstrated in her copious tears. Portrayed as an unwitting instrument of grace, Marie is unable to control the forcefulness of the Spirit within her. "As is written," Hugh of St-Victor interprets Matthew 24.28 and Luke 17.37, "Wheresoever the body shall be there shall the eagles also be gathered together." This distinguishes, Hugh writes, "body from head."<sup>107</sup> Marie declares, "I cannot restrain my tears." And the text explains, "For she saw an eagle on her breast which plunged its beak into it as if into a well and filled the air with great cries. Thus she understood in the Spirit that St. John had borne to the Lord her tears and groans."<sup>108</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx describes John:

Reclining on his breast and bending back his head to lay it in his bosom ... O John, tell us what sweetness, what grace and tenderness, what light and devotion you are imbibing from that fountain. There are indeed all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of mercy, the abode of loving kindness, the honeycomb of eternal sweetness.<sup>109</sup>

Marie's body is precisely this overflowing fountain where John the eagle (like James of Vitry himself) has come to drink.

Many were spiritually refreshed by her appearance and were stirred to devotion and to tears and, reading the Unction of the Spirit in her face as if they were reading from a book, they knew that virtue came from her.<sup>110</sup>

Not only are Marie's words as clear to followers as the veracity of the tears that sod her endless string of handkerchiefs, but James' language is liturgical. Marie becomes an expression of the Unction of the Spirit. When Marie ingests the flesh

<sup>107</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De Sacramentis* 2.8.10 (PL 176:468): "Sicut scriptum est: 'Ubi cunq; fuerit corpus, illuc congregabuntur et aquilae' (Matth. 24.28; Luc. 17.37) isti sunt pars corporis altera et sunt quasi simul duae partes istae: caput scilicet et haec altera pars corporis."

<sup>108</sup> *VMO* 2.10.90 (567): "'Nequeo,' inquit, 'lacrimas reprimere.' Videbat enim aquilam quamdam supra pectus suum, quae quasi in fonte in eius pectore tingeat rostrum, et magnis clamoribus aera replebat: et intellexit in spiritu, quod lacrimas eius et gemitum B. Joannes ad Dominum deferbat." Trans. King, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Institutis Inclusarum in Aelredi Rievallensis Opera omnia*, Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971-), 1:668; quoted in Marsha L. Dutton, "Christ Our Mother: Aelred's Iconography for Contemplative Union," in *Goad and Nail*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, 21-45, Studies in Medieval Cistercian History, no. 10, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 84, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 29.

<sup>110</sup> *VMO* 1.4.39 (556): "Multi ex eius aspectu spiritualiter refectionem ad devotionem et lacrimas provocabantur; et in vultu eius, quasi in libro unctionem Spiritus sancti legentes, virtutem ex ea procedere cognoscebant." Trans. King, 54.

of Christ it flows “from the palate of her heart to the palate of her body” and is “read” by others. James of Vitry wanted to show precisely that, as Hugh says of the Eucharist, “through the body of Christ we are made participants in vivification,”<sup>111</sup> so through the body of Marie we are made participants in vivification. Just as the sacrament is: “corporeal or material element set before the senses with out ... containing by sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace” — so Marie.<sup>112</sup>

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In one passage, James describes how Marie’s devotion to Christ’s humanity excludes her from the realms of higher consciousness:

She sometimes moderated her sorrow and restrained the flood of her tears and would raise her consciousness to the divinity and majesty of Christ and, by thus leaving behind a consideration of His humanity, tried to find some consolation in His impassibility. But when she tried to restrain the intensity of the flowing river, then a greater intensity wondrously sprang forth. When she directed her attention to how great He was who endured such degradations for us, her sorrow was renewed and new tears were revived in her soul through her sweet compunction.<sup>113</sup>

Richard of St-Victor teaches that when tears are found in contemplation then we have not found Rachel, reason, but Leah, sensibility, and the soul is in a lower state of perfection.<sup>114</sup> When the mind births contemplation, even Rachel, the last

<sup>111</sup> Hugh of St-Victor, *De sacramentis* 2.2.1 (PL 176:416): “... per corpus Christi et sanguinem vivificamur.”

<sup>112</sup> *De sacramentis* 1.9.2 (PL 176:517): “... diffinire potest quod sacramentum est corporale vel materiate elementum foris sensu. inter propositum ex similitudine repraesentans, [et ex institutione significans], et ex sanctificatione continens aliquam invisibilem et spiritalem gratiam.”

<sup>113</sup> *VMO* 1.1.16 (551): “Unde ut dolorem aliquando temperaret, et fluvium lacrimarum cohiberet, relicta humanitate, ad Christi divinitatem et majestatem animum attollebat, ut in eius impassibilitate reperiret consolationem. Sed unde fluminis impetum restringere conabatur, inde mirabiliter impetus maior lacrimarum oriebatur. Nam cum attenderet quantus fuit, qui tam abjecta pro nobis sustinuit rursus dolor renovabatur, novisque lacrimis anima eius dulci compunctione innovabatur.” Trans. King, 32.

<sup>114</sup> Richard of St-Victor, *De duodecim patriarchis* 4 (PL 196:4): “Sed quamdiu adhuc ad sublimia penetranda minime sufficimus, diu cupitam, diligenter quaesitam Rachel nondum invenimus. Incipimus ergo gemere, suspirare, nostram caecitatem non solum plangere, sed et erubescere .... Quotiens ergo in lectione divina pro contemplatione compunctionem reperimus, in cubiculo Rachel, non ipsam, sed Liam nos invenisse non dubitemus. Nam sicut Rachelis est meditari, contemplari, discernere, intelligere, sic profecto pertinet ad Liam flere, dolere, gemere, suspirare.

vestige of maternal dependency, has already died.<sup>115</sup> However much Marie is an extraordinary mediator, like Richard of St-Victor's Rachel, Marie must die before she can reach pure Spirit. And death is "where there is no more grief."<sup>116</sup> In *On Grace and Free Choice*, Bernard asks whether those who are "sometimes snatched away in the Spirit through the self-transcendence of contemplation" experience "freedom from unhappiness ...?"<sup>117</sup> As we have seen, in his own case, he humbly claims not to know the sublime happiness of "where the bride rests at noon," but rests instead in the sweet embrace of Christ-crucified, describing this as a "more refined philosophy."<sup>118</sup> In *On Grace and Free Choice*, he answers his question with the comment that they "do enjoy the liberty of bliss," but adds the qualifications that "the experience is very rare and very brief" and that it "is a partial experience, very deficient relative to the full experience and also exceedingly rare."<sup>119</sup> The full experience of release from suffering is a final freedom we achieve only after death.<sup>120</sup> Thus, James is merely being conventional when he says that Marie only achieves freedom from suffering after her death. In his "Letter to the Carthusians about Love," Bernard doubts whether it is possible for human beings to attain the fourth and highest degree of love. Although it is said that there are some who have experienced this, Bernard says, "For myself, I must confess, it would seem impossible."<sup>121</sup>

Marie expresses the humility of the flesh and James is quite content to keep her in her place as handmaiden to the Spirit, unable to ascend to higher levels of spiritual accomplishment until after her death. Even the *Life of Mary*

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Nam Lia, ut dictum est, affectio est divina inspiratione inflammata. Rachel est ratio divina revelatione illuminata."

<sup>115</sup> *De duodecim patriarchis* 73 (PL 196:52): When contemplation (Benjamin) is born, Rachel dies: "In tanta namque quotidiani conatus anxietate, in huiusmodi doloris immensitate, et Benjamin nascitur, et Rachel moritur (Gen. 35.19), quia cum mens hominis supra seipsam rapitur, omnes humanae ratiocinationis angustias supergreditur."

<sup>116</sup> *VMO* 2.12.109 (572): Death is "ubi dolore non affligitur corpus." See Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 3.6 (SBO 3:170).

<sup>117</sup> *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 6.15 (SBO 3:177): "An tamen fatendum est eos, qui per excessum contemplationis rapti quandoque in Spiritu ... toties esse liberos a miseria, quoties sic excedunt?"

<sup>118</sup> *SC* 43.3.4 (SBO 2:43).

<sup>119</sup> *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 6.15 (SBO 3:177): "Hi plane, quod negandum non est, etiam in hac carne, raro licet raptimque, complaciti libertate fruuntur .... et hoc ex parte, et parte satis modica, viceque rarissima." Cited in Casey, *Thirst for God*, 292-93.

<sup>120</sup> *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 3.6 (SBO 3:170): "Et item libertas a miseria .... Sed numquid et istam sibi quispiam in hac mortalitate praesumit?"

*Magdalene* goes further, divinising Mary when it teaches that through her tears “she ascended to the Father in her heart.” Gertrude’s sisters give her humanity a startling promotion. When Gertrude surrenders her body to become God’s instrument, “She did not hesitate to play the part of and equal with God *the Lord God of the universe*.”<sup>122</sup> Marie gets no such promotion from James. We might see this as a restricting limit on her spirituality, or, following the general theme of this thesis, we might view it as deeply humanist.

William of St-Thierry describes man as born with nothing but the knowledge of how to weep.<sup>123</sup> For Bernard of Clairvaux, weeping is an indicator of the human condition.<sup>124</sup> Gregory the Great teaches that there is no greater human punishment than the immutability that makes a man resistant to the life-bringing change of repentance.<sup>125</sup> The impenetrable stupor of wonder and amazement that makes a man one with angels<sup>126</sup> is the same condition that, in this life, makes a man spiritually barren. When Marie of Oignies tries to restrain the intensity of the flowing river of her tears, setting her mind upon his impassibility, then a greater intensity of tears wondrously sprang forth. Stillness and tranquillity are divine attributes — which is what makes them fundamentally inhuman.

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<sup>121</sup> *De dil.* 15.39 (SBO 3:153): “... nescio si a quoquam hominum quartus in hac vita perfecte apprehenditur, ut se scilicet homo diligit tantum propter Deum. Asserant hoc si qui experti sunt; mihi, fateor, impossibile videtur.”

<sup>122</sup> Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus* 1.10; trans. Winkworth, 68-9.

<sup>123</sup> William of St-Thierry, *De natura corporis et animae* 2 (PL 180: 715).

<sup>124</sup> *SC* 26.8.13 (SBO 1:180): “Sic nec fletus utique noster infidelitatis est signum, sed conditionis indicium.”

<sup>125</sup> *Moralia in Job* 25.6.10 (CCSL 143B:1235); cited in Straw, *Gregory*, 142.

<sup>126</sup> *SC* 23.4.11 (SBO 1:146): “... in somno quidem suavissimi stuporis placidaeque admirationis sentire quietem ....” Cited in Casey, *Thirst for God*, 295.



Petrus Christus, *Madonna of the Dry Tree*, panel, 1462, reprinted from James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall; New York: Abrams, 1985), p. 156, fig. 155.

## Conclusion

In contemplative tradition, weeping in prayer is considered a turning point to an ensuing mystical experience. Irénée Hausherr's study of the doctrine of *penthos* in the Eastern church demonstrates how, in accordance with a metaphysical hierarchy from matter to spirit, the contemplative mystic's goal is to pass through the physical medium of bodily tears to a spiritual plateau of beatitude and bliss, a plateau from which suffering and tears are excluded. Richard of St-Victor's description of compunction, in which tears signify the death of "Rachel" in the birth of contemplation, is a good example of a Western version of this originally Eastern model. Sandra McEntire's and Piroska Nagy's accounts of the doctrines of compunction and the gift of tears in the West confirm the extensive influence of the Eastern model of transitional tears in Western medieval monasticism.

This study has presented evidence of a different understanding of the spiritual significance of tears in the West. While the interpretive method employed here has meant that our textual selection has been smaller than the vast traditions surveyed by Nagy, McEntire and Hausherr, we have nonetheless seen evidence of a strong thematic coherence on this topic across the *longe durée* of nearly a thousand years. From the fourth to the thirteenth century, the examples that we have looked at here — Augustine's preference of humble, infantile tears to contemplation; Bernard of Clairvaux's confessed inability to transcend tears; the obliteration of Marie of Oignies' aspiration to a higher truth by the endless flow of her tears; and so on — conform to an alternative discourse in which, rather than being mutually exclusive, Spirit and weeping necessarily coincide. The central argument of this thesis is that this Western discourse on tears differs from Eastern *penthos* because it expresses a different philosophy of freedom from contemplative, a philosophy of freedom that goes back to Augustine and deeply informs Western mysticism.

In concluding my first chapter, I argued that Augustine's doctrine of original sin had a profound effect on Western mysticism, not because, as is often said, it inhibited the latter's development, but because it is an important precept for a different view of freedom from contemplative, which in turn predicates a different style of mysticism. Reflecting a Platonist philosophical influence, contemplative freedom is defined by the absence of suffering, punishment and any kind of dependency; freedom amounts to a situational "freedom from" the constraints of law and punishment. With regards to tears, this underlying philosophy of freedom means that while the suffering represented by tears may pre-empt contemplation — as a final and punitive purge — weeping itself remains the antithesis of a "detached" freedom. In contrast to this model, Augustine's insistence on the inevitability of punishment in the postlapsarian condition — as evidenced in the infant's inherited *mortality* — precludes the possibility of attaining the situational freedom that is required for contemplation. Thus, if contemplative freedom is no longer the goal of mysticism, tears necessarily lose their transitional value and take on an altogether different meaning.

As Augustine interprets Romans, the difference between human liberation (the way of faith) and subservience (the way of the law) is not the presence or absence of suffering *per se*; nor is it escape or exemption from punishment. Instead, liberation is defined by the presence of a new interior *attitude* in the face of inevitable condemnation, an attitude of unsubmitive voluntariness. Although he is not circumstantially liberated from punishment in his crucifixion, Christ's different attitude frees him from a passive and unwilling subjugation before the external imposition of an inevitable (and just) punishment.

For Augustine, tears represent an "inner crucifixion" because they express the voluntary punishment that is the key to a liberating engagement with law. Augustine defines all grief and sadness as the punishing realisation that the soul has lost an object of love. But the realisation of loss experienced in grief teaches the important and beneficial lesson of the preciousness of the erstwhile love. Since love is an emotion we cannot but voluntarily choose, we want this knowledge of our old love, even if it is only testified through the painful experience of grieving its absence. In this sense, tears represent an acquiescent punishment, a

knowledge we seek even while the seeking causes us pain. Tears thus create a way through the moral impasse that so troubled Paul in Romans, in which goodness is obligatory and fear turns humanity into slaves before punishment, by guiding human beings towards a social life in grace and love through the means of voluntary punishment.

Augustine's in-depth psychological and moral treatment of the significance of tears seems not to have directly influenced the early Benedictine spirituality of tears, which, according to Nagy and Hausherr, followed the contemplative model. John Cassian's teachings on compunction and the models of ascetic life represented in the *Lives* and *Sayings* of the desert fathers were the primary sources of this Eastern influence. As we have seen, Eastern conventions were also confirmed in regulations on "right" and "wrong" forms of weeping listed in penitential manuals. For the development of our theme, it is significant that when, in the late-eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury sees himself as reforming centuries of Benedictine spiritual practice, he criticises asceticism in Pauline terms for its "obedience" and presents a radical new interpretation of Christian freedom to which *imitatio* through weeping is central.

Following his famous mentor, for Anselm, the crucifixion represents a new way of *living* under the law, a way that involves the reconfiguration of punishment, not its transcendence. Well known for his staunch commitment to original sin, as for Augustine, so too for Anselm, a sense of the inevitability of human punishment is precursory to the constructive development of an alternative notion of human freedom. For Anselm, "life under the law" is signified in a human society so caught up in obligations of payment and return, and so entrapped in the strings of *inevitable debt*, that human beings have lost entirely the ability to give freely. Ascetic obedience fulfils the letter of the law, giving what is required, but it demonstrates no initiative in giving — nothing that would turn the punishment of "having to give" into the spiritual act of a "free gift."

By contrast, Christ's willingness to take on the human punishment of death when he was not obliged to do so demonstrates true altruism. Although human beings cannot reverse the effects of original sin and become free of debt in the unsoiled way of Christ, in my chapter, I argued that the model of compunction represented in Anselm's prayers demonstrates a means of human imitation through penitence. We can never avoid having sinned, but the human capacity to feel genuine remorse for sin demonstrates our (belated) capacity for goodness. This initiative towards goodness motivates us to the voluntary punishment of tears shed lovingly on behalf of the one we have wronged. These penitential tears are not offered out of obligation, but testify to a deeper ability to give freely — albeit one only tragically recognised after we have entered into sin.

Anselm's critique of Benedictine asceticism and "triumphalist" Carolingian soteriology — both models of situational freedom — and his new focus on the redemptive power of Christ's human suffering introduces a new tension to medieval spirituality, a tension that is apparent in the greatest twelfth-century philosophers of the incarnation, including Bernard of Clairvaux.

Although Bernard's mysticism appears to be structured in the classic mode of contemplative ascension, this surface appearance is muddied by the undercurrent of his Augustinian morality. Love is the key to Bernard's mysticism, but Bernard's concept of love is morally defined in strict Pauline terms as the means through which human goodness is potentially liberated from the inferior motivations of reward and fear. Following our now familiar model, for Bernard, the crucifixion indicates a liberating renegotiation of punishment, rather than avoidance, transcendence or exemption. Voluntary punishment fulfils the human quest for love and self-knowledge in a bittersweet moment of compassion. In compassion, we experience a harmony of brotherly wills that renders the mediocre social bonds of reward and compulsion redundant. Compassionate self-knowledge is punishing, and gives rise to tears, because in compassion we see our own self-limits reflected in another. But through affirming the power of love, compassion lifts us out of the most painful human limitations of isolation and partiality.

While it is not, of course, a theological endpoint, Bernard of Clairvaux's development of our theme is, in many ways, satisfyingly conclusive. First presented in the stark form of

Paul's brilliant yet disturbing "Letter to the Romans," where it manifests as literal imitation through suicidal martyrdom, the idea of a moral alternative to obedience through the freedom of voluntary punishment provided the key to Augustine's highly individual mysticism of desire and the basis for Anselm's humanistic soteriology and influential penitential model. But Bernard's theology fulfils the social potential of our moral theme by emphasising how the punishing condition of human relativity, which creates separateness, is also the basis for beneficial and emotionally sustaining social interdependence.

In my final chapters, I interpreted characteristic features of the new mysticism — sacramentalism, bodiliness, femininity, simplicity, emotional spontaneity, literalism etc. — as expressions of this new social relativity. In particular, I explored how the new movement's distinctive sacramentalism expresses our theme. As we saw, the sacramental theory of twelfth-century thinkers like Hugh of St-Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux draws from a patristic idea of the Incarnation as the "birth of the Word," a concept that we traced from Origen to Augustine and Gregory the Great. The incarnation of the Word for the purpose of liberating communication expresses the idea of freedom through voluntary punishment because the Word's birth is — like all births — a painful, punishing experience. The incarnate Word is not only traumatically born, but in entering its material form it descends to the punishing condition of imperfection, fragmentation and the cacophony of signs from which its latent truth can only be recovered through effective communication.

As we have seen, it is this view of signs as an expression of our condition of punishment that medieval authors express when they equate words with tears, or with blood and suffering. The nuns at Helfta have read and cite Hugh of St-Victor (whose writing on sacrament borrows extensively from Augustine) when they explain how Christ "condescended" to human frailty in becoming visible, and they express this theme physically in the bloodiness of their pens and in the continuous weeping that overtakes them as they write. This descent to punishing, limiting signs has a redemptive purpose — it is a voluntary punishment undertaken for the sake of achieving loving communication. Living in grace and through faith translates into a practice of communication that embraces, in its every expression, the voluntary punishment revealed in the crucifixion.

From its final avant-garde expressions in late-medieval sacramentalism back to its origin in Augustine's critique of Platonism, we have seen how the spirituality of tears in the West expresses an alternative form of freedom from the contemplative ideal of transcendence. This thesis has interpreted the Western acceptance of Augustine's doctrine of original sin positively, as a paradigm which allowed the construction of an alternative morality, a narrow means of expressing the vivacity of goodness in the face of mortal condemnation. Feeling the pain of suffering and its emotional equivalent in the piercing strike of grief makes humanity vulnerable. But it is a necessary wounding that also makes us the participants of redeeming mutuality.

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