
Saint Augustine Lecture 2004

Augustine and a Crisis of Wealth in Late Antiquity

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I must begin by confessing that I owe to the deficiencies of voice-mail a valuable occasion to re-think the purpose of this lecture. For I left on the voice-mail of Professor Martin the title of the lecture: “Augustine and a Crisis of Wealth in Late Antiquity.” I received—again by voice-mail—a delighted reply. He fully approved of my title: “Augustine and a Crisis of *Wills* in Late Antiquity.” I realized, to my shame, that I had awoken false expectations in the heart of a great Augustinian scholar. Of course, “Wills” is what a St Augustine Lecture should be about. It was on the Will that Augustine wrote with greatest passion and tenacity, and with the gravest long-term consequences. And I had offered, for the occasion of a St. Augustine Lecture, not “Will” but merely “Wealth.”

As I rang back to Professor Martin, in a somewhat shamefaced manner, to disabuse him and to confirm my original title, I consoled myself by one thought. When he came to make an anthology of the thought of Augustine, Augustine’s greatest admirer and younger contemporary, Prosper of Aquitaine, faced the same disillusionment as I was about to inflict on Professor Martin. As he drew up his *Sententiae* from the works of Augustine, Prosper realized that the great man had said almost everything about everything. But on the subject of wealth, there was nothing to be found in all his works of any notable trenchancy or originality. Augustine on Wealth simply did not lend himself to a *Sententia*. So, somewhat to our surprise, Prosper ended the collection not with a quotation from Augustine, but from another author. Under the rubric of wealth, Prosper put in an eminently quotable quote from Basil of Caesarea, taken from a Latin translation of his sermons.¹

So here I find myself in the position of Prosper. I am asking Augustine to say something significant on a topic on which, apparently, he had never brought to bear his mighty intellect in a focused and continuous manner—as he did, so very plainly, on topics such as the issue of the will.

Yet, I think that, by following the reactions of Augustine to the views of a singularly vehement and consequential body of opinion on the status of the wealthy and on the use of wealth in the Christian church, associated with the opening phase of the Pelagian controversy (between the years 411 and 417) we may gain something that is of greater interest, perhaps, to the historian than would be any crisp treatise *de divitiis*—On Wealth—written in a more

1. Prosper of Aquitaine, *Liber sententiarum* 392, ed. M. Gastaldo, *Corpus Christianorum* 68A (Turnhout: Brepols 1972): 364-365.

formal style. We can listen in on a sharp debate which touched on crucial aspects of the Christian church as it rose to prominence in the last century of the Roman Empire in the West. Hence my decision to turn back to the works of Augustine, and to study what, for Prosper of Aquitaine, was a topic on which the master had apparently said nothing worthy of quotation. And hence my title, “Augustine and a Crisis of Wealth in Late Antiquity.”

Concerning part of the title, at least, we can be certain. There was a lot of wealth in the later Roman West, and a large portion of it had, over the centuries, flowed into the hands of a very small number of great families.² Historians of the decline of the Roman empire note this fact with ill-disguised disapproval. They assure us that these great families were headed for a crisis and that, if anything, they deserved it. Indeed, no account of the fall of the western empire is complete without reference to the manner in which the concentration of so much landed wealth in the hands of a few members of the senatorial class in Italy, Spain and Gaul contributed disastrously to the weakening of the authority of the Roman state and to the general impoverishment of the population.³

Making his career from provincial Africa to Italy and back again, in the 370s and 380s, Augustine found himself brought from time to time into contact with awesome representatives of this aristocracy, many of whom still resided in Rome as active members of the Roman Senate. It was they who determined the careers of smaller men such as himself. In 384, for instance, Augustine was chosen for the post of teacher of rhetoric in Milan by the Urban Prefect of Rome, the great pagan Symmachus—a man whose landed wealth (largely but not exclusively concentrated in Italy) has been shown by sober economic historians to have been four to five times greater than that enjoyed by an Italian senator of the classical period, such as the younger Pliny.⁴ It was through

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2. W. Jongmann, The rise and fall of the Roman economy. Population, rents and entitlement, *The Ancient Economy*, ed. P. Bang, M. Ikeguchi and H. Ziche (to appear) analyzes the long-term structural mechanisms which led to such accumulation.
 3. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell 1964): 1066–1068; P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson 1971): 115–120; and, memorably, G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Duckworth 1981): 503. P. Heather, Senates and senators, *The Cambridge Ancient History, volume XIII: The Later Empire A.D. 337–425*, ed. Averil Cameron and P. Garnsey (Cambridge University Press 1998): 194–210, at pp. 191–195, is less damning—the great landowners were, at least, less otiose than we had supposed.
 4. R. Duncan-Jones, The finances of a senator, *The Economy of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge University Press 1974): 17–32 on Pliny; K. Hopkins, Rome, taxes, rents, and trade, *The Ancient economy*, ed. W. Scheidel and S. von Reden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2002): 190–230, at pp. 205–207; D. Vera, Simmaco e le sue proprietà, *Symmaque: à l’occasion du mille six*

the good offices of *amici maiores*—of “friends in high places”—who were closer than he ever could hope to be to the truly great, that Augustine came within sight of an advantageous marriage and a provincial governorship after only two years in Milan.⁵

But Augustine was not the only remarkable protégé of this charmed circle of great landed families. Saint Ambrose himself had been placed in the bishopric of Milan by a Roman grandee of exuberant wealth and dubious political reputation—by Petronius Probus, the head of the family of the Anicii.⁶ In the words of Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary historian, Probus was “a man known for the distinction of his family, his influence, and his great wealth throughout the whole Roman world, in almost all parts of which he possessed estates here and there, whether justly or unjustly is not a question for my humble judgment.”⁷

Even after he had returned to Africa and become the bishop of Hippo, Augustine frequently brushed against the tentacles that the Roman aristocracy had pushed deep into society in the provinces. To take the Anicii alone. Changes in the real estate of Hippo required the good offices of its members. The consent of Italica (probably a daughter-in-law of Petronius Probus) had been necessary to settle the question of the transfer of a house adjoining church property in Hippo.⁸

Italica, as far as we know, had never set foot in Africa. Like most members of her class, she was an absentee landowner. But, only a few years later, as the Gothic army of Alaric closed in on Rome, in 409 and again in 410, members of the Anician family were among the first refugees to reach Carthage.

centième anniversaire du conflit de l'autel de Victoire, ed. F. Paschoud (Paris: Belles Lettres 1986): 231–276; T. D. Barnes, Augustine, Symmachus and Ambrose, *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliam (Waterton, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University 1992): 7–13.

5. Augustine, *Confessions* 6.11.18 and *Soliloquia* 10.17–11.18. C. Lepelley, *Spes saeculi: le milieu social d'Augustin et ses ambitions séculières avant sa conversion*, *Congresso internazionale su Sant'Agostino nel xvi centenario della conversione*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 24 (Rome: Istituto Patristico “Augustinianum” 1987): 99–117, esp. 111, n.39, now in *Aspects de l'Afrique romaine. Les cités, la vie rurale, le christianisme* (Bari: Edipuglia 2001): 329–344; J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992), 2: 374.
6. N. B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994): 38–39 and 49–50.
7. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 27.11.1, ed. J. C. Rolfe, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1952), 3: 73–75. On Petronius Probus, see now John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London: Duckworth 1989): 277–278.
8. Augustine, *Letters* 92 and 99. s.v. Italica 1, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire 2: Italie*, pt. 1, ed. C. Pietri and L. Pietri (Rome: École française de Rome 1999): 1162–1163.

Two years later, in 412, Augustine met the widow of the great Petronius Probus, Anicia Faltonia Proba, when she was residing in Carthage as a refugee.⁹ With studious deference, he acceded to Proba's request for a work of spiritual advice. He wrote her a long letter *On Prayer*.¹⁰ A little later he wrote to congratulate Proba on her recovery from an illness. At the bottom of the letter Augustine was careful to append the correct formal greeting in his own hand: "distinguished lady, deservedly illustrious, most outstanding daughter."¹¹

There was no disguising the gap between the two groups. Seen from Italy by members of the Anicii and their like, the Catholic bishops of Africa were little men—provincial intellectuals who might, from time to time, be encouraged to contribute, with due modesty, to the theological interests of the great.¹² This was made only too plain a few years later. By 417, the noblewomen and their entourage had returned to Rome. It was from Rome that the daughter-in-law of Proba, Anicia Juliana, wrote to tell Augustine that he and his episcopal colleague Alypius were out of line when they urged her to look into the spread of Pelagian ideas in her household: it was not for provincial bishops such as they to suggest that *domuncula nostra*—"our modest family"—had ever been tainted with heresy.¹³

These spasmodic encounters between Augustine and the truly great show that, after he returned to Africa from Italy and settled down as bishop of Hippo, from 396 onwards, he had come to rest in a distinctly more low-profile, provincial environment than he had known, for a time, in an Italy still dominated by the great landowners of Rome. We should always bear in mind this contrast when we consider Augustine's attitude to debates on wealth which had originally flared up outside Africa, in Rome, southern Italy and Sicily.

9. s.v. Proba 2, *Prosopographie chrétienne 2: Italie*, pt. 2: 1831–1833. On the excavations of her palace on the Pincian Hill, see H. Broise, M. Dewailly, V. Jolivet, Pincio (Jardins de Lucullus), *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Antiquité* 112 (2000): 432–453 at pp. 439–449. For the possibility of a private chapel dedicated to Saint Felix of Nola on her property, see C. Sotinel, Chronologie, topographie, histoire: quelques hypothèses sur *S. Felix in Pincis*, église disparue, *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del congresso internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma (iv-x secolo)*, Studi di Antichità cristiana 69 (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana 2002): 449–471 at pp. 466–469.

10. Augustine, *Letter* 130.

11. Augustine, *Letter* 131.

12. Éric Rebillard, Augustin et le rituel épistolaire de l'élite sociale et culturelle de son temps. Éléments pour une analyse processuelle des relations de l'évêque et de la cité dans l'Antiquité tardive, *L'évêque dans la cité du ive au ve siècle*, ed. Éric Rebillard and Claire Sotinel, Collection de l'École française de Rome 248 (Rome: École française de Rome 1998): 127–152.

13. Augustine, *Letter* 188.2–3. S.v. Juliana 3, *Prosopographie chrétienne 2: Italie*, pt. 1, pp. 1169–1170.

For, on becoming bishop of Hippo, Augustine found himself involved in the destinies of a provincial Catholic church whose own wealth was highly problematic. It is surprising how little we know about the finances of the Catholic church in Africa. We often have to make do with glimpses of individual churches at widely separated moments in their history. The vivid details of the church-treasures and personnel of the church of Cirta/Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century, in the time of the Great Persecution, (as this was caught, over a decade later, in the record of a subsequent investigation into the origins of the Donatist schism) is one tantalizing example.¹⁴ One wishes one had more. But at least we know enough for certain common misconceptions to be avoided.

First, the Catholic church was not a rich church, nor was it necessarily a church exclusively of the rich. It was not until the early sixth century that any church in the Latin West came to hold properties which equalled in their extent and income the estates of the great secular landowners.¹⁵ Up to then, the Catholic church had remained overshadowed by the truly wealthy—and the church of Africa seems to have been no exception to this rule.

Second, despite the assertions of many modern scholars,¹⁶ the Catholic church in Africa was not a state church, securely established by imperial fiat at the top of African society. Although the Catholic bishops came increasingly (after 405 and especially after 411) to enjoy the support of the imperial authorities in their contest with the Donatists, they found that the imperial administration was niggardly in the extreme in acceding to their wishes on almost every other issue which concerned the social activity of the church and the status of its representatives in African society. The newly-discovered Divjak letters, in particular, tell a dismal story. Bishops frequently found themselves

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14. *Gesta apud Zenophilum* (of 320 A.D.) in Appendix 1 to Optatus of Milevis, *On the Schism of the Donatists*, ed. J. Ziwsa, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 26 (Vienna: Tempsky 1882): 185–197, trans. M. Edwards, *Optatus: Against the Donatists* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press 1997): 150–169, now studied by Y. Duval, *Chrétien d’Afrique à l’aube de la paix constantinienne* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes 2000): 169–173 and 408–420.
 15. C. Pietri, *Évergétisme et richesses ecclésiastiques dans l’Italie du ive au ve siècle*, *Ktéma* 3 (1978): 317–337 now in *Respublica Christiana*, Collection de l’École française de Rome 234 (Rome: Palais Farnèse 1998), 2: 813–833 and C. Sotinel, *Le personnel épiscopal. Enquête sur la puissance de l’évêque dans la cité*, *L’Évêque dans la cité*, pp. 105–126 are model studies. See in general Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 894–914 with *Church Finances in the 5th and 6th Centuries*, *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 11 (1960): 84–94.
 16. As tends to be assumed (with increasingly little foundation) ever since the ground-breaking presentation of the Donatist schism in terms of social and ethnic conflict, by W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: a movement of social protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952).

unable to protect those who had fled to sanctuary in their churches.¹⁷ There was a constant shortage of clergymen. Heavy taxation had impoverished the urban classes from whom the clergy was most often recruited, and the imperial government systematically restricted the tax benefits of those who served the church.¹⁸

Rather than being a church of the upper classes, the social composition of the Catholic church was little different from that of its Donatist rival. In many areas, the Donatist church had enjoyed the protection of the local landowners.¹⁹ The Catholic clergy seem to have represented faithfully the drab respectability of the small-town elites, the honest artisans and the small farmers who characterized so much of African life outside the shimmering metropolis of Carthage. There were no *grands seigneurs* among them. Most bishops were little men and their clergy were smaller still. When they sinned (through embezzlement, sharp practice and violence) their sins were usually the sins of small-town *déclassés* on the make and not the sins of the overnighty.²⁰

What is more important is the fact that, precisely in the decades when Augustine became bishop, the structure of the wealth of the churches of Africa had begun to change. Previously, the churches appear to have been financed on a regular basis by the free will offerings of the faithful. This certainly was an ideal to which many Christian communities remained attached.²¹ But it was

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17. Augustine, *New Letter 22*3*, ed. *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 46B: Lettres 1*–29**, Bibliothèque augustinienne (Paris: Études augustinienes 1987): 350, trans. R. Eno, *Letters of Saint Augustine VI (1*–29*)*, Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press 1989): 157.
18. Augustine, *New Letter 22*.2*, ed. p. 348, trans. Eno, p. 157; see now Rita Lizzi Testa, *Come e dove reclutare i chierici? I problemi del vescovo Agostino, L'adorabile vescovo d'Ippona*, ed. F. E. Consolino (Saveria Mannelli: Rubbettino 2001): 183–216.
19. C. Lepelley, *Les sénateurs donatistes*, *Bulletin de la société nationale des Antiquaires 1990*, pp. 45–56, now in *L'Afrique romaine*, pp. 345–356.
20. Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England 2002): 64–65—for the social background and ups and downs of the clergy of Hippo. See in general W. Eck, *Der Episkopat im spätantiken Afrika. Organisatorische Entwicklung, soziale Herkunft und öffentliche Funktionen*, *Historische Zeitschrift* 236 (1983): 265–295. There are few aristocrats among the clergy to be found in the invaluable *Prosopographie chrétienne 1: Afrique (303–533)*, ed. A. Mandouze (Paris: CNRS 1982).
21. G. Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der syrischen Didaskalia*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 26* (Münster: Aschendorff 1998) is a particularly valuable study of this phenomenon and its relation to the ideal order of the churches in Syria in the third and fourth centuries.

an ideal whose time was running out. The slow pile up of legacies to the churches, which had been declared lawful from the time of Constantine onwards, had begun to take effect. Most churches now possessed land and a permanent source of income. As a result of this more stable endowment, day to day giving appears to have slackened. Augustine faced this problem in Hippo. Possidius was careful to point this out in his *Life of Augustine*:

When, as often happened, this property [of the church] roused envy against the clergy, he would address his flock and tell them that he would rather live on the contributions of the people of God [the *collationes*—the solemn religious collections] than be burdened with the care and administration of this property, and that he was quite ready to hand it over to them and let all God’s servants and ministers live in the way we read in the Old Testament, that those who serve the altar should share in its offerings. But the laity was never willing to undertake it.²²

Possidius, perhaps, was unfair on the laity. The laity were not necessarily mean. They found themselves caught between two systems of giving, related to two different phases of their lives—on the one hand, weekly giving for the support of the poor, the clergy and the upkeep of the churches; and, on the other, giving “for the good of their soul,” through legacies that would continue their memory after death and, somehow, benefit them in an other world. Some simply dithered between the two systems:

Once one of the leading citizens of Hippo wished to present his estate to the Church of Hippo. . . . Augustine gladly accepted his offering and congratulated him on being mindful of his eternal salvation. But some years later, when I [Possidius] happened to be staying with Augustine, what should the donor do but send his son with a letter requesting that the title-deeds [of the estate] be handed back to the son and giving directions [instead] for a distribution of a hundred *solidi* to the poor.²³

This is a small incident in itself. But it indicated a major “friction point” in the structures of giving on which the African churches had depended. We should not exaggerate the wealth and stability of these churches. Landed endowments had accumulated over the years. But they had not accumulated sufficiently to make the churches independent of regular lay giving. Nor had imperial privileges been sufficiently generous to create, in Africa, a secure basis for the

22. Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 23.4, ed. M. Pellegrino, *Verba Seniorum* 4 (Alba: Edizioni Paoline 1955): 124, trans. F. R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers* (New York: Harper 1965): 221–222.

23. Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 24.4–5, ed. Pellegrino, pp. 126–128, trans. Hoare, pp. 222–223; cf. *Sermon* 355.5 for a similar case involving Aurelius of Carthage.

wealth of the church. Just as the impressive urban fabric of the little towns of Africa, in the classical period, had once depended (in the words of Ramsay MacMullen) on the “sheer willingness” of those prepared to put money into stone,²⁴ so, now, at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Catholic church of Africa (and, one suspects, also its Donatist rival) still depended to a large extent on the “sheer willingness” of its laity for the completion of its buildings, for the care of its poor and for the support of its monks and clergy.

We see this dilemma very clearly in a series of sermons which Augustine preached at Carthage in December 403. The sermons recently discovered by François Dolbeau have enabled us to place an unusually extensive series of *Enarrationes* on the Psalms, which Augustine preached at Carthage, into a precise context.²⁵ And the context is shown to have been an open conflict in two definitions of “sheer willingness.”

The *Enarrationes* preached by Augustine on this occasion contain some of the few references which have survived from the sermons of Augustine to the duty of the laity to support their clergy.²⁶ His repeated appeals may have been prompted by the building of a new church.²⁷ What is significant, however, is that Augustine’s preaching took place against the back-drop of the return of a season of stunning—and entirely non-Christian—public giving by the elites

24. Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press 1974): 61.

25. Notably Augustine, *Dolbeau Sermons 5 and 26* (On the Kalends of January), ed. F. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d’Afrique* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes 1996): 435–449 and 366–417 (respectively), trans. E. Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. III/11 New Sermons* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press 1997): 102–117 and 180–237. These are connected with *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 147, 103, 146, 102, 57 and 66 (preached in that order). The *Enarrationes* were first grouped together and dated to December 409 in an exemplary study by A. M. La Bonnardière, Les “*Enarrationes in psalmos*” prêchées par Saint Augustin à Carthage en décembre 409, *Recherches augustiniennes* 11 (1976): 52–90. I would accept the suggestion of Dolbeau, *Vingt-six sermons*, p. 374, reinforced by P. M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes 2000): 563–588, which would place these sermons in December 403 by linking them to newly-discovered *Dolbeau Sermons*.

26. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 103, sermon 3.9–12; 80.4; 146.16–17 and 102.12. For other references in Augustine’s other writings to the duty of the laity to support the clergy, see La Bonnardière, Les “*Enarrationes in psalmos*”, p. 62, n. 38, of which see esp. *Contra Faustum* 5. 9–11 and *de opere monachorum* 5.6 and 16.18. At Hippo Augustine could expect to raise as much as 40 *solidi* through a *collatio*: *Sermon* 356.15.

27. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm.* 103, sermon 3.12 and 80.4, with L. Ennabli, *Carthage. Une métropole chrétienne du ive à la fin du viie siècle* (Paris: CNRS 1997): 148–149.

of Carthage, to support a series of traditional *munera*. These were annual, obligatory displays of public good cheer. They preceded the high holiday of the Kalends of January. They began on December 10 with *venationes*, with matador-like combats with wild beasts. They went on to elaborate mime-dances. They culminated, on December 20, with chariot races, followed the next day by a naval spectacle in a water-filled amphitheater. Last but not least came the solemn bestowal of expensive robes on star performers.²⁸ The shows were proverbially expensive—indeed, to appear to court bankruptcy by lavish giving was a matter of pride.²⁹ Despite Augustine’s repeated denunciation of their wastefulness, frivolity and immorality, they were deeply serious matters. The elites of Carthage expressed through them their loyalty to the emperor and their faith in the continuing “Good Fortune” of their city.³⁰

Public displays such as these involved the most spectacular transfers of money through private giving that a late Roman person could expect to witness on a regular basis. The need to gather and distribute the sums involved in these displays set the pace for the finances of the wealthy for years on end. As a result, the upper classes of Africa and Italy—as elsewhere throughout the late Roman Mediterranean—found themselves locked into a discipline in public giving which left little room in their lives and in their hearts for any other form of meaningful generosity.³¹ It was a generosity to which the Catholic church in Carthage, as elsewhere, was entirely peripheral.³² Compared with

28. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 147.3, 7 and 12; 103, sermon 1.13; 80.1 and 23; 102. 12–13. These references are excellently analyzed by La Bonnardière, Les “Enarrationes in Psalmos”, pp. 71–75, and are placed in the wider context of civic generosity in late Roman Africa by C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l’Afrique romaine sous le bas-empire* (Paris: Études augustiniennes 1981), 1: 110–111; 310–314 and 2:44–47. To these we can now add Augustine, *Sermons Dolbeau* 5.14. 315–323, ed. Dolbeau, p. 446, trans. Hill, pp. 112 and 26. 1.1–2.43, ed. Dolbeau, pp. 366–368, trans. Hill, pp. 180–181.

29. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm.* 147.7.

30. See esp. R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge University Press 1990): 107–123 and J. Scheid, Les réjouissances des calendes de janvier d’après le *sermon Dolbeau* 26. Nouvelles lumières sur une fête mal connue, *Saint Augustin Prédicateur (295–411)*, ed. G. Madec (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes 1998): 353–365.

31. It is revealing that members of the elite in Africa placed mosaics showing the games in their town-houses. The *munera* which they had provided were both emblems of their wealth and good fortune and were intended to become part of family-memory: see esp. K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978): 65–108. In general, see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press 1992): 82–85.

32. Lepelley, *Les cités de l’Afrique romaine*, p. 383.

the sums spent by the elites of Carthage and their yet wealthier peers in Rome, the funds which Augustine had hoped to raise on behalf of the Catholic church on this occasion would have been modest in the extreme.³³

Yet, though overshadowed by intermittent outbursts of old-world, civic generosity on the part of the truly rich, the financial importance of the “sheer willingness” displayed by the congregations of the churches in Africa should not be underestimated. For it was based on a regular, almost daily practice of giving by all members of the congregation. It was low-profile but resilient.³⁴ But what exactly was the essence of the “sheer willingness” of the Christian congregations? Here the analogy with the civic euergetism of the pagan world, though it has proved extremely useful in rendering intelligible many features of the life of the church in late antiquity, should not be strained too far to cover phenomena which were essentially different.

For the “sheer willingness” of the churches of Africa was bathed in an atmosphere of the supernatural. Gifts to the church, to the monasteries and to the poor were not like ordinary gifts. They were gifts to the sacred. They were part of a mysterious sacral flow, by which the wealth of the material world, given by God, was offered back to God, following a long tradition of pagan and Old Testament sacrifice, of votive giving and the offering of first-fruits. As Augustine said in December 403:

De illius das qui iubet ut des.

You give from the good things of Him Who commands that you should give.³⁵

All over the Christian world, from northern Italy to Syria, the mosaic pavements of the churches of this time are a commentary on these words. Relatively moderate sums were spent to add panel to panel of mosaic work, each in fulfillment of the vow of believers and their families.³⁶

33. To gain a rough measure of the extent of the contrast: In 401, Symmachus spent 284,000 gold *solidi* in seven days on the praetor's games of his son: Olympiodorus, fgt. 41.2, ed. R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns 1983), 2: 204. In 445, bishop Rusticus of Narbonne celebrated in an inscription carved on the lintel of the cathedral which he had rebuilt, the fact that he had raised, from the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul and from episcopal colleagues, 2500 gold *solidi*!: H. I. Marrou, Le dossier épigraphique de l'évêque Rusticus de Narbonne, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 3–4 (1970): 331–347, at pp. 332–340.

34. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 56–57.

35. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm.* 147.13.

36. J. P. Caillet, *L'évergétisme monumental chrétien en Italie et à ses marges d'après l'épigraphie des pavements de mosaïque (ive–viii s.)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 175 (Rome:

Furthermore, following Christ's words in the Gospel, gifts to the poor in particular were tinged with the magic which came from the bringing together of two stark incommensurables. "Treasure" on earth, by being tossed, as it were, into a social void through the magnificently counter-factual act of giving to the faceless poor (who could offer nothing in return), became transformed, as if through supernatural alchemy, into "treasure in heaven."³⁷ Last but not least, in a manner which Jews and Christians had repeated for centuries (but seldom stopped to analyze: so essential was the habit and so deeply rooted was it in the common sense of an entire religious community) these pious gifts had the ability to expiate sins, both in this life and (so it was believed: but, again, the belief was rarely analyzed) somehow in the next.³⁸

These were fixed components in the common sense of wealth in the African churches. But they were not necessarily part of the common sense of all Christians in all regions. Just across the water, in Rome, southern Italy and Sicily, the common sense definition of the religious function of wealth was being put under unprecedented strain. This happened at a time of chilling public emergency that culminated in Alaric's sack of Rome; and it happened among the very richest of the rich.

Palais Farnèse 1993). For a fine African example, in the church at Henchir el-Erich, see now F. Baratte and F. Bejaoui, *Églises urbaines, églises rurales dans la Tunisie paléochrétienne, Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, nov.-déc. 2001*, pp. 1447-1497, fig. 45 at p. 1496. P. Baumann, *Spätantike Stifter im Heiligen Land. Darstellungen und Inschriften auf Bodenmosaik in Kirchen, Synagogen und Privathäuser* (Wiesbaden: Reichert 1999): 195-267. On votive formulae in the Greek East, see esp. J. Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philol.-Hist. Klasse: Denkschriften 190 (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 1987): 54-59. In Judaism, see T. Rajak, *The Gifts of God at Sardis, Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. M. Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1998): 229-239, at pp. 236-238.

37. E. Urbach, *Treasures Above, Hommages à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Louvain: Peeters 1980): 117-124 and K. Koch, *Der Schatz im Himmel, Leben angesichts des Todes. Helmut Thielicke zum 60. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1968): 47-60. For Augustine, see: B. Ramsay, *Almsgiving in the Latin Church: the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries, Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226-259 and L. J. Frahier, *L'interprétation du récit du jugement dernier* (Mt. 25: 31-46) dans l'oeuvre d'Augustin, *Revue des études augustiniennes* 33 (1987): 70-84.

38. Augustine, *Sermon 172.2.2*. One should note that Augustine is extremely reluctant to define what the effects of the prayers and *oblaciones* of the faithful might be upon the fate of the deceased in the afterlife. The pressure to give an answer to this question plainly came from the laity: see now the model study of Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture. L'Église, les vivants et les morts dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales 2003): 174-197, esp. at pp. 190-193.

We must be careful to delimit the impact of this crisis. Despite the prominence achieved in Christian circles by the few great renouncers of this time, the majority of their senatorial colleagues and kinsfolk appear to have continued, largely unimpressed, to husband their resources in the traditional manner.³⁹ But we are dealing with a development which, to use Gibbon's measured words on the preaching of the First Crusade, had "touched a nerve of exquisite sensibility" among the Christians of the entire western Mediterranean. The radicalism associated with the ascetic ideal of a total renunciation of all property put into question exactly how wealth was to be redeemed, and exactly how much wealth had to be "scattered" to the poor for it to redeem the guilty souls of the very rich.

By the year 405, for a young aristocrat such as Pinianus (then aged around twenty five) and his wife, the younger Melania (then aged around twenty one), to be the owner of a fortune worth over 120,000 golden *solidi*, had become, quite literally, the stuff of nightmares.

One night [Melania said] we went to sleep, greatly upset, and we saw ourselves, both of us, passing through a very narrow crack in a wall. We were gripped with panic by the cramped space, so that it seemed as if we were about to die. When we came through the pain of that place, with great effort, we found huge relief and joy unspeakable.⁴⁰

This vivid story, from the *Life of Melania the Younger*, is so well known that we often forget its full significance. The dream plainly referred to the words of Christ: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24)*.

But it is a dream with no camel and no needle. Instead, the words of Christ are transformed into an experience of primal horror. The dream relived with terrible intensity the constriction of the rich. And the narrow crack is not only the eye of a needle—it is an excruciatingly narrow birth canal. Only through the abrupt and total renunciation of their riches could the young couple be "reborn."

Across the sea, at Hippo, Augustine was perched on the outer edge of the world of Pinianus and Melania. But, at Rome, close to hand to Melania, to Pinianus and to their admirers, stood another, widely-respected spiritual

39. J. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital. Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2000): 298–313.

40. *Life of Melania the Younger* 16, ed. D. Gorce, *Vie de sainte Mélanie*, Sources chrétiennes 90 (Paris: Le Cerf 1962): 158–160; trans. with commentary, E. A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press 1984): 39.

guide—Pelagius.⁴¹ In the course of the turmoil of the sack of Rome, which (as we have seen) had driven the great ladies of the Anician family straight to Carthage, other refugees took the route which led through Sicily to Hippo. Melania and Pinianus were among these. And so was Pelagius. Admirers of Pelagius also traveled in the ascetic retinue of Pinianus. For a few breathless years, between 411 and 417, a vehement debate on the nature and purpose of wealth in the Christian churches spilled over on to the shores of Africa. For the first time in his life, Augustine was faced with a “crisis of wealth” of major proportions. What was more significant: this crisis of wealth was inextricably intertwined, both intellectually and in the persons of those involved, with the opening stages of his mighty duel with the ideas of Pelagius.

Let us see what this meant. For we learn quite as much about Augustine as we do about the Pelagian movement itself through looking carefully at the views of certain Pelagian extremists and at how Augustine came to defend the redemptive uses of wealth and to infuse his own, distinctive views on sin and grace into the religious practices which had grown up around him in the church of Africa.

On the subject of wealth and charity, Pelagius himself was unexceptional.⁴² The same could not be said for an anonymous follower of Pelagius who, at some time around 410, wrote a treatise known as *De Divitiis*—On Wealth. This unknown author was first introduced to English-speaking scholarship in the 1960s (through the brilliant if flawed advocacy of John Morris) under the somewhat raffish name of “The Sicilian Briton.”⁴³ He has since declined into a less colorful “Anonymous Roman.” Nor can we any longer acclaim him, as John Morris did—with the ill-disguised enthusiasm of one who spots a fellow Marxist flitting through

41. P. Brown, Pelagius and his Supporters. Aims and Environment, *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 19 (1968): 93–114 and The Patrons of Pelagius. The Roman Aristocracy between East and West, *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 21 (1970): 56–72, now in *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber 1972): 183–207 and 208–226. The reader should know that my view (expressed in “Pelagius and his Supporters”)—that Pelagius tended to see the church as a closed elite of ascetics—has been rightly challenged by S. Thier, *Kirche bei Pelagius*, *Patristische Studien* 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter 1999): 149–150. As Thier points out, I may have mistaken the views of more radical Pelagians for those of Pelagius himself.

42. The fundamental study, to which I have owed most in writing this paper, is Andreas Kessler, *Reichumskritik und Pelagianismus. Die pelagianische Diatribe de divitiis: Situierung, Lesetext, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, *Paradosis* 43 (Freiburg/Schweiz: Universitätsverlag 1999): 36–48. See also Thier, *Kirche bei Pelagius*, pp. 207–215.

43. J. Morris, Pelagian Literature, *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s., 16 (1965): 26–60.

the sinister twilight of Roman Britain—as the author of a treatise “whose crisp argumentation . . . is by any text-book definition socialism.”⁴⁴

These reservations apart, the author of the *De Divitiis* retains a sharp and unforgettable profile. For what he argued, among other things, was that wealth had come into existence in a manner bleakly independent of the providence of God. It was the result of “human presumption” alone, in which the will of God had played no role whatsoever. He concedes that the Old Testament did indeed record a few rich men acceptable to God. But Abraham, Isaac and Job had been specially chosen exceptions to the dire rule of history. All human time before God’s calling of Abraham had been occupied by tyrants and by men of power, in a world whose social order had been created by the clash of human wills alone, acting in a purely human space left vacant by God.⁴⁵ By withdrawing wealth, in this manner, from the providence of God, our Anonymous Roman stripped it of meaning in a Christian world.⁴⁶

Indeed, for the author of the *De Divitiis*, there could be no such thing as innocent wealth. Every fortune—even a fortune as seemingly stable and free from the taint of active grasping, in the eyes of contemporaries, as was inherited, family wealth—was an unnecessary accumulation whose origin lay in conscious acts of spoliation. He deployed a remorseless syllogism. To be “rich” was to have more than was “sufficient.” To have more than was “sufficient” was, automatically, to take something from others.⁴⁷

Tolle divitem et pauperem non invenies.

Get rid of the rich man and you will not be able to find a poor man. Let no man have more than he really needs, and everyone will have as much as they need, since the few who are rich are the reason for the many who are poor.⁴⁸

44. Morris, *Pelagian Literature*, pp. 51–52, see Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, pp. 102–135. The “Anonymous Roman” continues to delight: see P. Garnsey and C. Humfress, *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (Cambridge: Orchard Academic 2001): 197–203 for a pungent appreciation of the *de divitiis*.

45. *De divitiis* 9. 1, ed. C. P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten* (Christiania: Mallingsche Buchdruckerei 1890; reprint Brussels: Culture et Civilisation 1964): 36, now in *Patrologia Latina Supplementum* 1: 1390; trans. B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 1991): 184; see Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, pp. 378–380.

46. B. Ramsey, s.v. Wealth, *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1999): 876–881 at p. 880 sees this clearly.

47. *De divitiis* 1.2; 5.2; 7.2; 8.1, ed. Caspari, pp. 25, 29, 33 and 34, *PLS* 1: 1380, 1382, 1387–8 and 1388, trans. Rees, pp. 174, 178, 181 and 182; see Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, pp. 188–199, 344–346, 351.

48. *De divitiis* 12.2, ed. Caspari, p. 48, *PLS* 1: 1401, trans. Rees, p. 194.

Thus, when Christ had said that *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, He spoke of an outright impossibility. His words could not be palliated by allegory, by special pleading or by ingenious textual emendation—unless, of course, the Anonymous added, one could find an unusually large needle or, perhaps, an unusually small camel.⁴⁹ Only those rich persons who, like Melania and Pinianus, had squeezed through that agonizing crack, by totally abandoning their property, could hope to reach the Kingdom of God.

As far as we can see, Augustine never read the text of the *De Divitiis*. In 414, however, a certain Hilarius wrote from Syracuse listing five propositions, “on which certain Christians in Syracuse are holding forth.” Although neither Hilarius nor Augustine ever mention the name of Pelagius himself, Augustine instantly associated these propositions with the views of Pelagius’s more extreme followers, whose views have survived in the *De Divitiis*. One proposition said:

A rich man who remains in his riches will not enter the Kingdom of God unless he sells all that he has: nor will those be of any use to him [in securing salvation] even if he uses them to fulfill the commandments [that is, through almsgiving].⁵⁰

To have denied the rich the chance to save themselves through almsgiving was a serious matter for Augustine. For it touched directly on two central issues: on Augustine’s particular notion of sin and penance, and on more general notions, current in the African churches as elsewhere, on the nature of religious giving.

There is no need, among connoisseurs of Augustine, to linger on the first of these issues. As Éric Rebillard has demonstrated so persuasively, Augustine believed that the life of a Christian was a life of continual penance.⁵¹ The pious Christian was a human hedgehog. He or she was covered from head to foot with the tiny, sharp spines of daily, barely conscious *peccata minutissima*—tiny little sins.⁵² It was to expunge these that the Christian should pray every day *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us* (*Matthew* 6:12).

49. *De divitiis* 18.1, ed. Caspari, p. 55, *PLS* 1: 1407, trans. Rees, pp. 200–201; see Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, pp. 406–417.

50. Augustine, *Letter* 156 (to Hilary of Syracuse); see Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, pp. 85–100.

51. Éric Rebillard, *In Hora Mortis. Évolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort aux ive et ve siècles*, Bibliothèque de l’École française d’Athènes et de Rome 283 (Rome: Palais Farnèse 1994): 148–167.

52. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm*. 103 sermon 3.18 (of December 403).

This aspect of the piety of Augustine has been exhaustively studied, now almost half a century ago, by Anne-Marie La Bonnardière.⁵³ In a masterly article, she pointed out how this crucial passage in the Lord's Prayer was seized upon by Augustine, in the opening years of the Pelagian controversy, as the touchstone of orthodoxy.⁵⁴ Recited by the baptized before receiving the Eucharist, the phrase *Forgive us our trespasses* left no room for the Pelagian claim that some baptized Christians, at least, could live without sin.⁵⁵ To Augustine, the prayer was a daily reminder of a daily state of sinfulness, which cried out for daily forgiveness. To deny this was to touch the very heart of his religion. By the year 415, Augustine's notion of what the Christian society of the future might look like was simple in the extreme: it consisted of being able to hear the "thunder" of "thousands of persons" beating their chests, every day, as they recited the Lord's Prayer.⁵⁶

Yet we should not overlook an other aspect of Augustine's notion of daily penance which runs through his preaching both before and after the onset of the Pelagian controversy. Like all other Christian preachers of his generation, he never doubted that prayer for forgiveness should be accompanied by almsgiving.⁵⁷ If anything, he promoted the saying of the Lord's Prayer into the position of the expiatory action *par excellence* which common Christian opinion had always granted, rather, to the giving of alms.⁵⁸ For almsgiving and the forgiveness of one's enemies were the "twin wings" which brought the Lord's Prayer up to heaven.⁵⁹

What Augustine did was to pull almsgiving into the powerful gravitational field of a notion of daily expiation implied in the daily recitation of the Lord's

53. A. M. La Bonnardière, *Les commentaires simultanés de Mat. 6.12 et de 1 Jo. 1.18 dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustine, Revue des études augustiniennes* 1 (1955): 129–147, see also *Pénitence et réconciliation de Pénitents d'après saint Augustin I Revue des études augustiniennes* 13 (1967): 31–53 at pp. 47–53.

54. La Bonnardière, *Les commentaires*, pp. 129–131. On the manner in which such touchstones of orthodoxy were developed, see now É. Rebillard, *Sociologie de la déviance et orthodoxie. Le cas de la controverse pélagienne sur la grâce, Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire*, ed. S. Elm, É. Rebillard and A. Romano, *Collection de l'École française de Rome* 270 (Rome: École française de Rome 2000): 221–240.

55. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm.* 142.6.

56. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm.* 140.18.

57. E.g., O. Plassmann, *Die Almosen bei Johannes Chrysostomus* (Münster: Aschendorff 1961), with Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, p. 95.

58. Augustine, *Sermon* 261.10.

59. Augustine, *Sermon* 58.9.10.

Prayer. “Daily” was the ever-recurrent word which Augustine used, whether he spoke of sin, of prayer, or of almsgiving. The human condition demanded this. The soul was a leaking vessel on the high seas. Little trickles of daily sins constantly seeped through the timbers, silently filling the bilge with water which might yet sink the ship if it were not pumped out. And to man the bilge-pump was both to pray *and* to give alms:

And we should not only pray, but also give alms. . . . Those who work the bilge-pump lest the boat go down do so [chanting sea-shanties] with their voices and working with their hands. . . .⁶⁰

Let the hands go round and round. . . . Let them give, let them do good works.⁶¹

It would, of course, be unjust to Augustine to see in this preaching simply the exposition of a doctrine calculated to impart momentum to the somewhat unsteady mechanism of religious giving in the African churches. Augustine’s notion almsgiving did not focus only on the giving of money. He was adamant that forgiveness of one’s enemies was, in itself, a form of alms, quite as necessary for the forgiveness of sin as was giving to the poor.⁶² This was no small thing in a litigious society, prone to violence, in which the bishop’s court—the *episcopalis audientia*—had come to be welcomed precisely because it was a peace-making institution which placed a “cap” on rancorous litigation.⁶³

Nor could Augustine be sure that the expiatory character ascribed to the giving of alms would be automatically extended by his hearers to other forms of religious giving to the church—such as church building and the payment of the clergy. These could be inspired by other motives, such as gratitude to one’s clergy, pride in one’s local church and the wish to stand out as a generous giver.⁶⁴

But, despite these provisos, the economic effects of almsgiving should not be underestimated. It still played a significant part in the overall finances of the church. Preaching in Antioch, John Chrysostom insisted that, if the laity took more responsibility for the care of the poor, through almsgiving, the church would be relieved of some of the burden of poor relief which had come to fall on the bishop

60. Augustine, *Sermon* 56.7.11.

61. Augustine, *Sermon* 58.9.10.

62. E.g., Augustine, *Sermon* 352.2.7; see La Bonnardière, *Les commentaires*, p. 141.

63. E.g., Augustine, *Sermon* 49.8; see Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 68–69.

64. A fact noted with characteristic acerbity by Jerome: *In Hieremiam* 2.108.5 on *Jeremiah* 11:15–16: *Patrologia Latina* 24: 755D: “Nowadays they recite in public the names of those who bring offerings, and what is a ransom for sins is changed into an occasion for praise.”

and clergy.⁶⁵ Furthermore, regular almsgiving was a training in religious giving as a whole. It reinforced other habits of generosity among those who were “mindful of their eternal salvation.” As we have seen, this generosity could take the form of substantial legacies to the church from well-to-do lay persons.⁶⁶

What mattered was that, in his writing and preaching both before and after the spread of Pelagian ideas on wealth and perfection, Augustine had placed behind the ancient and largely unreflecting practice of expiatory alms-giving the heavy weight of a view of human nature which made daily expiation a necessity: those who prided themselves on giving “a few grains” of alms must always think of the mass of sins which silently piled up behind them every day.⁶⁷ Religious giving was part of daily life, because daily life itself was defined by sin. It took place against the noise of the steady creak of the bilge-pump of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

It was the need to justify the permanent penitential and expiatory role of alms-giving and of similar “acts of mercy” which drove Augustine’s tenacious defence of the rich, both before and during the Pelagian controversy. Already in December 403 he made this plain. Christ had, indeed, said that *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.*

He has practically slammed the door in the face of the rich.

“What will happen, what will happen? The door’s shut”

Knock, and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7)

“How?” say the rich,” How shall we knock?”

How else but with your hands?

What does this mean, “with your hands”?

Knock with your good works.⁶⁸

Almsgiving and accessibility to fellow-believers within the church were to be the salvation of the rich. This salvation was not easy; but it was possible. Commenting (perhaps in April 407) on the mysterious eschatological passages in *Matthew* and *Luke*—*and two shall be at the mill: one will be taken and the other will be left (Matthew 24:40–41 and Luke 17:34–35)*—Augustine pointed

65. John Chrysostom, *In I Cor. Hom.* 20.6–7: *Patrologia Graeca* 61: 179–180.

66. Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 24.4.

67. Augustine, *Sermon* 9.19.

68. Augustine, *Dolbeau Sermon* 5.9.176, ed. Dolbeau, p. 441, trans. Hill, pp. 107–108.

out that the mill was the “world,” to whose dangers and temptations the rich were exposed more than anyone. There were all too many who were ground between its terrible stones.

Surely there are many sins that are seen to be specific to the rich. The more active they are, the more property they have to administer, the more extensive a household depends on them, the more difficult it is for them not to bring upon themselves more sins. About them it is said that *it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle*.

But, he added, *what is not possible with men is easy with God* (Matthew 19: 26). For God could change the hearts of the rich. They could come to obey the teaching which Saint Paul passed on in his *First Letter to Timothy: Charge them that are rich that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches* (I Timothy 6:17). As a result, they could become the “good rich,” which meant, in effect, the generous rich: *rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share..* (I Timothy 6:18).⁶⁹ Such persons made the turning millstones of the “world” work for them: *they . . . use the world as if not using it* (I Cor. 7:31).⁷⁰

Augustine repeated this message, with unusual insistence, after the sack of Rome. He addressed the anxious rich—noble refugees and their retinues. There is even a phrase in one sermon, which may well echo the trenchant slogan of the *De Divitiis*:

Tolle superbiam: divitiae non nocebunt.

Get rid of pride and wealth will do no harm.⁷¹

Coming from anyone other than Augustine, this would seem a banal and evasive answer. But in Augustine’s case it was driven by a deep momentum. And here, of course, we come to what Professor Martin was looking for. We have here a genuine “crisis of wills.” For what was at stake, between Augustine and the Anonymous Roman, were two views of the will of the rich. As Augustine saw it, only God’s grace—and not the “sword of the free will” to

69. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm*. 132.4. Luc Verheijen, *Nouvelle approche de la Règle de Saint Augustin, Vie Monastique* 8 (Bégrolle-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Solesmes 1980), 1: 53. This sermon is usually placed in April 407, see now Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie*, p. 425.

70. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalm*. 132.4: for a list of occurrences of this citation from 1 Corinthians 7:31 in the later sermons of Augustine, see Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie*, pp. 424–425.

71. Augustine, *Sermon* 37.4, Kessler, *Reichtumskritik*, p. 399.

which Pelagius appealed when addressing ascetic renouncers⁷²—could tame the proud will of the rich.

To speak of Augustine's letters and sermons to the wealthy, in the years after 411, as if they consisted primarily in reassuring the rich that what really mattered was an inward disposition and on the degree of the rich person's inner detachment from the things of this world, is to render his attitude to "the world" singularly cold and ethereal. It was never, for him, a matter of simply having one's "heart in the right place." For the only "heart" which could face the terrible, turning millstone of "the world" was a heart which had been broken and re-made by God. The miracle was that, throughout history, from long before Abraham up to the present day, a thin chain of rich persons had borne the weight of "the world" with a heart made tender through grace. When Augustine wrote to Proba (perhaps with Pelagian polemics on wealth already in his mind) he cited *Psalm 22 (21): 26: their heart shall live from age to age.*⁷³

And here, of course, Augustine's thought on wealth follows a pattern strictly analogous to other aspects of his thought on the church. The more we know, for instance, about Augustine's attitude to the cult of the martyrs, the more his attitude to the relation between those few heroes and heroines who had made a total renunciation of their wealth and the unheroic majority of Christians who retained their property, while using it for pious purposes, appears to fit into the wider rhythms of his thought. Challenged by Pelagian ideas, he came to insist that God's grace touched both categories of persons—the heroic and the unheroic.

As we know, the festivals of the martyrs marked the high points of Christian piety in Africa. The martyrs were men and women sheathed in the "glory" of God. They were vibrant examples of His grace. No one doubted this. What Augustine went out of his way to say was that exactly the same grace might stir, discreetly, at first, but eventually—who knows? – triumphantly, in the hearts of every believer.⁷⁴

72. Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 1, *Patrologia Latina* 30: 16B, trans. Rees, p. 36.

73. Augustine, *Letter* 130.3.8.

74. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. New Edition with an Epilogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000): 453–454 and 508–512 with *Enjoying the saints in late antiquity, Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 1–24, at pp. 3–14. The reader should know that the chronology of the new Dolbeau sermons of Augustine, in which he touches on the cult of the martyrs, is no longer certain. Dolbeau had opted for an early date, 397; but Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie*, pp. 517–525, would wish to place them at the time of the Pelagian controversy. In this case, the crystallization of Augustine's attitude to martyrdom and his reaction to Pelagian ideas on the renunciation of wealth may have converged consciously and at the same time.

God who gave grace to them can give it to us.

By that grace they became his friends; we can, at least, by the same grace, become His servants . . . and why not , then, also his friends: through his grace, that is, and not through our own will.⁷⁵

It was the same with the renunciation of the rich. Augustine had always hugely admired the great renouncers of his age. He himself had been converted by the story of how Saint Anthony had been summoned by a reading of the verses: *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come and follow Me (Matthew 19:21)*.⁷⁶ Paulinus of Nola, the greatest renouncer of his generation until the conversion of Pinianus and Melania, was a close spiritual friend.⁷⁷ But, just as the martyrs had not left the average Christian without hope that he or she might drink at the same fountain of God's grace as they had done, so the charisma which surrounded the renouncers of great fortunes was not to cause the less spectacular and less heroic rich, who had retained their wealth, to lose faith that they, also, might become "good" rich and acceptable to God. Their hearts, also, might *live from age to age*.

Augustine was not alone in thinking in this way. In the words of an elegant inscription, carefully placed at the entrance door to the popular pilgrim shrine of Saint Salsa at Tipasa:

Clausula iustitiae est martyrium votis optare.

Habes et aliam similem, aelemosinam viribus facere.

The highest pitch of righteousness is to wish for martyrdom.

You have another like it: to give alms to the best of your ability.⁷⁸

And so to conclude. As always with Augustine, there was a practical side to such deep musings. His doctrine of grace served to empower the pious practices of the average member of the Christian congregations. What he proposed, in effect, was a doctrine for the long haul. It was a doctrine which spoke to the habits of the "little big men" who had rallied round the Catholic church in Africa. Retired public servants, town-councilors, comfortable farm-

75. Augustine, *Sermon 335H*, *Revue bénédictine* 68 (1958): 130 = *Patrologia Latina Supplementum* 2: 831.

76. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.6.15 and 12.29.

77. S. Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola. Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen christlichen Intellektuellen*, *Hypomnemata* 134 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 2002): 473–485.

78. Y. Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae. Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du vie au viie siècle*, *Collection de l'École française de Rome* 58 (Rome: Palais Farnèse 1982): no. 173, p. 366.

ers, managers of the estates of the great absentee landowners: these were the “rich” to whom Augustine spoke on a daily basis.⁷⁹ But, in Africa, the “sheer willingness” associated with religious giving extended even further down the social scale. One of the most significant phenomena of fourth and fifth centuries was the emergence of rural communities with independent bishoprics. These were often based on the joining of villages and were usually connected with the rapid building of churches, sometimes by communal effort.⁸⁰ As a result, lay donors (some rich, but many of modest means) formed the tenacious underpinning of the local churches. Augustine told them that what they did on a regular basis, if performed with a “living” heart, were “good works.” They were caused by the grace of God. They gained his forgiveness for daily sins. They were, indeed, fully acceptable to Him. They were an *opus caeleste*, “work touched by heaven.”⁸¹

Such persons did not suffer from the vertigo of wealth which suddenly came upon the owners of senatorial fortunes in Italy and Gaul. Rather, they needed to know how they could turn the relentless millstone of the “world” into a beneficent flow of sacred, expiatory wealth. The experiences of a Pinianus and a Melania were not theirs.

Pinianus and Melania came up against this fact the moment that they arrived in Africa. Their own notion of renunciation had involved the dizzy “scattering” of gold. Wealth was there to be “vaporized.” Nothing did this more effectively than turning it, as quickly as possible, into the most liquid (and portable) of all substances—into golden coins—and sending it, far from home, to the ends of the earth.⁸²

79. A revealing cross-section of the classes involved with the church can be found in Augustine’s description of the diffusion of the relics and miracles of Saint Stephen, in *City of God* 22.8 and in his description of the misdeeds of bishop Antoninus of Fussala, in *New Letter* 20*, ed. 292–342, trans. Eno, pp. 131–149. See also F. Morgenstern, *Das soziale Umfeld des Augustinus von Hippo dargestellt anhand seiner Briefpartner*, *Augustinianum* 32 (1992): 323–339.

80. See the outstanding study of L. Dossey, *The Dangers of Resemblance. Peasants, Commodities and Rebellion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press to appear). For a church built outside Timgad through the collaboration of three villages, see S. Gsell, *Atlas archéologique de l’Algérie* (Alger: A. Jourdan 1911), fasc. 27, no. 278.

81. E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres*, no. 1103.6 (Zurich: Weidmann 1970), 1: 217, on an early fifth-century bishop of Tipasa.

82. *Life of Saint Melania the Younger* 15 and 19, ed. Gorce, pp. 158 and 162–164, trans. Clark, pp. 38 and 41, with Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 61. Much of this may have been spent in Italy itself for the ransom of prisoners at the time of the Gothic invasion: *Life of Saint Melania the Younger* 19, ed. Gorce, p. 168, trans. Clark, pp. 42–43. In south Asian traditions, greater spiritual merit

The bishops of Africa would have none of this. “Sheer willingness,” expressed through the support of the local churches, and not the “scattering” of wealth, was what they wished for. In the words of the *Life of Melania*:

When the blessed ones decided to sell all their property [in Africa], the most saintly and important bishops (I mean blessed Augustine, his brother-bishop Alypius, and Aurelius of Carthage) advised them saying, “The money that you now furnish to monasteries will be used up in a short time. If you wish to have a memorial forever in heaven and earth, give an estate and its income to each monastery.” Melania and Pinianus eagerly accepted the excellent counsel of the holy men and did just as they had been advised by them.⁸³

But, in fact, the young couple left Africa for Jerusalem within a few years. The great noble ladies of the Anician house returned to Rome. After 417, the Catholic church in Africa buckled down to make the best it could of what “sheer willingness” remained among the laity.

But it is precisely there that Augustine’s insistence on the need for permanent penance—and hence on the permanent need, in every Christian community, for old-fashioned, dogged almsgiving by persons of all classes—came to link up with his abiding sense of wonder at God’s workings in the heart (even in the hard hearts of the rich). This convergence of Augustine’s notions of penance and grace with traditional pious practice made sure both that “willingness” would last and that, through his doctrine of grace, such “willingness” would always be invested with a touch of glory.

And so to conclude, let us look ahead for a moment into the next century.

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that, when Augustine’s writings became known in Italy and Gaul, it was the laity who seemed to take most naturally to them. For Augustine had empowered them. He had validated their day-to-day pious actions—their penance and their giving—through his doctrine of grace. Often they found in it a more merciful doctrine than that proposed by many of their own clergy. To take the example of one phenomenon which continued spasmodically to cause

is attached to gifts to *distant* shrines and to unknown “wanderers”: J. Parry, *The Gift*, the Indian Gift and the “Indian Gift”, *Man* n.s. 453–473, at p. 463. It is revealing that Paulinus of Nola was first urged by Jerome (*Letter* 53.11) to sell off all his property immediately (from which sale Jerome’s monastery in the Holy Land was sure to benefit). In fact, Paulinus disbursed his money more slowly, putting much of it into shrines connected with himself and his family: Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola. Life, Letters and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1999): 90 and 133–159 and Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola*, pp. 78–103 and 120–136.

83. *Life of Saint Melania the Younger* 20, ed. Gorce, p. 170, trans. Clark, p. 43.

concern in fifth century Gaul—the death-bed penance of lay persons. This was seen by some ascetic critics as a melodramatic, easy way out. In the opinion of Faustus of Riez, it was unwise to offer to lay persons the hope that their sins might be expiated in this way—“through rushed but ineffective groans.”⁸⁴

But it was precisely such a groan which betrayed, for those of Augustinian disposition, that God’s grace had at last—and better late than never—taken hold of the heart. As pope Leo wrote, to rebuke the purists:

We should not make difficulties nor neglect the tears and groans of those who accuse themselves. For we believe that the warm desire for penance comes from the inspiration of God.⁸⁵

The families of the dying needed the comfort of such an interpretation of the tears of the deceased. And the sincerity of those tears would be guaranteed by good works—by traditional gifts to the poor and by legacies to the church “for the redemption of the soul.” For these traditional acts of religious giving were also thought to have been touched by the same grace of God as had brought about the repentance of the dying. In such conditions, Julianus Pomerius, a convinced Augustinian, and himself a refugee from Africa, when he wrote about the wealth of the church, in Arles around 500 A.D., could expect his readers to take for granted that “the property of the church is made up of nothing other than the votive offerings of the faithful, the price they pay for sins, properties transferred to the poor.”⁸⁶

Hence, when the Council of Orange met in 529, to affirm the central tenets of the Augustinian system, the occasion of the council was the consecration of a church built by Liberius, the Prefect of Gaul. Erected “with most faithful devotion,” the new church proclaimed that the actions of a rich lay person (and not only the acts of ascetics and members of the clergy) might be bathed in the favor of God.⁸⁷

84. Faustus of Riez, *Letter 5*, ed. A. Engelbrecht, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 21 (Vienna: Tempsky 1891): 184; see Rebillard, *In Hora Mortis*, pp. 222–223.

85. Leo, *Letter 108.4: Patrologia Latina* 54: 1013; see Rebillard, *In Hora Mortis*, p. 220.

86. Julianus Pomerius, *de vita contemplativa* 2.9: *Patrologia Latina* 59: 454A. On the importance of Pomerius, see esp. W. C. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles. The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge University Press 1994): 73–77 and C. Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2000): 65–80.

87. *Council of Orange*, Pref. ed. C. de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae A.511–A.695, Corpus Christianorum* 148A (Turnhout: Brepols 1963): 55. For church building by lay persons in Liberius’s Italy, see now Luce Pietri, *Évergétisme chrétien et fondations privées dans l’Italie de l’antiquité tardive, “Humana sapit”*. *Études d’antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini*, ed. J.-M. Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa, *Bibliothèque de l’Antiquité Tardive* 2 (Turnhout: Brepols 2002): 253–263.

Among the Augustinian propositions approved by all present at the Council of Orange was an extract from the *City of God* made by Prosper of Aquitaine:

On the Binding Force of Vows: No one, whoever they may be, can rightfully make a vow, unless they have received from God what they have vowed. As it is written [concerning David's wish to build the Temple]: *And what we have received from Your hand, that do we give You* (I *Chronicles* 29:14).⁸⁸

In the sixth century, David was the archetypal pious lay person, and the building of the Temple was the archetype of the building of any large church.⁸⁹

Prosper of Aquitaine, as we saw, did not get a quotable quote out of Augustine on the subject of wealth. But, in other extracts, he got the main point. He linked grace and religious giving. And so it is that a sharp if momentary “crisis of wealth,” experienced in the Rome and Africa of the early fifth century, came to be distilled through Augustine's preoccupations with sin, grace and penance into a distinctive and long-lasting view of Christian charity and of Christian loyalty to the Church. It would maintain its momentum for centuries in the early medieval West, long after the great civic shows had ceased and the empire-wide estates of the senatorial order had been dispersed and fallen into the hands of smaller men, living within the more narrow, more provincial horizons of a post-imperial world.

In this, as in so much else, we can see how it is that, precisely because he believed so passionately that God lived in the details—that a touch of his “glory” could be found in the daily piety of lay persons (even in the lives of the ordinary rich) and not only in the high deeds of His saints—that Augustine would emerge as truly a Founder of the Middle Ages.

88. *Council of Orange*, c. 11, ed. de Clerq, pp. 58–59; Prosper, *Liber Sententiarum* 54, ed. Gastaldo, p. 270 (taken from *de civitate Dei* 17.4.176–177).

89. I. N. Wood, The audience of architecture in post-Roman Gaul, *The Anglo Saxon Church*, ed. L. A. S. Butler and R. K. Morris (London: Council for British Archaeology 1986): 74–79 at p. 76, on Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* 3.6; for the church of Saint Polyeuctos in Constantinople, founded by the sixth-century noblewoman Anicia Juliana (a worthy descendant of Proba and Juliana!) as a copy of the Temple of Jerusalem, and later imitated by Justinian in his Hagia Sophia, see M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium. The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace Church in Istanbul* (London: Harvey Miller 1989): 137–144.