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## Augustine on Heart and Life

### Essays in Memory of William Harmless, S.J.

Edited by John J. O’Keefe and Michael Cameron

#### 4. Expanding the Heart

##### Graced Desire

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##### Abstract

This article presents Augustine’s reflections on how the heart is stretched by welcoming God in the midst of difficulty. Divine initiative and human response are intertwined in beautifully mysterious ways. This reflection also provides a good example of how Augustine’s meditation on the scriptures – that is, on Psalm 4 – was enriched with the passage of time.

Keywords: heart, psalm, joy, dilatation

## God in Creation<sup>1</sup>

Augustine thought of God's creation as a great book;<sup>2</sup> the created universe invited attention and even wonder at the fact that everything God created is good (see *Civ.* 19.13). His interest in learning about God from the things that he made may have been inspired by Paul's letter to the Romans, where Augustine learned that to gaze on creation was to begin to know the one who made it – as long as the heart was engaged in the right way.<sup>3</sup> For Augustine, in fact, the heart is central: it has the same attributes that can be found in the external senses: “Do you not have ears in the heart? What else was the Lord saying: *Those who have ears for hearing, let them hear* (Luke 8:8)? Do you not have eyes in the heart? What then was the apostle saying: *With the eyes of your heart enlightened* (Ephesians 1:18)? Return to the heart; see there perhaps what you may sense about God, because that is where God's image is.”<sup>4</sup> It is possible to know God with the heart.

## Reading the Heart

In the Middle Ages, it was thought that Augustine had inspired the idea that the heart could be read, as if it were itself a book:

For Augustine the inner person and interior life were centered in the *heart* . . . the moral and spiritual core of the human being . . . throughout his writings Augustine portrayed the heart as a place of “writing,” “erasure,” “reading,” “interpretation,” and other textual operations (Jager: 28).

Even though that is true, Augustine sees himself more often as conversing with his heart rather than merely being a keen observer of what is to be *read* there. For the heart is “the center of moral and intellectual life, including conscience, understanding, the affections, volition, and memory” (Jager: 29).<sup>5</sup> The one who reads the heart is God: “My heart and my memory lie

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is inspired by, and is a tribute to, the man who had begun to write a book about “heart” in Augustine, a man who honored us by his scholarship, his friendship, and his probing, stimulating presence: William Harmless, S.J.

<sup>2</sup> *S.* 68.6: “There is a certain great big book, the book of created nature” (*est quidam magnus liber ipsa species creaturae*). Unless otherwise noted, English translations of Augustine are mine.

<sup>3</sup> *S.* 52.15: “Let words be stilled, the tongue cease from wagging; let the heart be stirred, the heart be lifted up to the mystery. That, you see, is not something that can rise up into the heart of man, but something to which the heart of man should rise up. Let us take a look at creation: ‘For his invisible things are to be observed, being understood from the creation of the world through the things that have been made’ (Romans 1:20).”

<sup>4</sup> Augustine speaks about all of the senses of the heart. “Notice how all the senses of the body convey within to the heart what they have sensed outside; notice how many ministers the one who rules within has in his service and what he does by himself, even without these ministers. The eyes inform the heart about white and black, the ears inform the same heart about melodious and discordant sounds; the nostrils inform the same heart about perfumes and rottenness; the sense of taste informs the same heart about things bitter and sweet; the sense of touch about things smooth and rough; and the heart informs itself about things just and unjust. Your heart both sees and hears and distinguishes between the other senses, and – what the senses of the body do not aspire to – it distinguishes between things just and unjust, things evil and good” (*Io. eu. tr.* 18.10). In another place, he even talks about “the feet of the heart” (*En. Ps.* 64.2; see also *Io. eu. tr.* 32.4).

<sup>5</sup> In the *Confessions*, *pectus* is at times also associated with *cor*.

open before you” (*Conf.* 5.6.11, *coram te cor meum et recordatio mea*). Augustine recounts the workings of God in his heart in a heartfelt way. For thus is the story of his conversion a story of the heart that is told *with the heart* and addressed *to the hearts* of others (*Conf.* 10.3.4). In other words, a complex set of relationships characterize Augustine’s understanding of the heart.

Thus, in a letter written in 396 CE to Paulinus of Nola and his sister Therasia, Augustine wrote about two visitors who had come from Nola, describing them as “an additional letter from you.” Augustine said that he “read” this letter with more than his eyes and ears: “From the very face and eyes of those speaking, we read with inexpressible joy you yourselves, who were written in their hearts” (*Ep.* 31.2, *ut per ipsum etiam uultum oculosque loquentium, vos in cordibus eorum scriptos cum ineffabili laetitia legeremus*). He goes on to say that his conversation with these visitors allowed him to copy the letter written in their hearts into his own heart. That the welcome of guests can be described in terms of heart-to-heart interaction showed that the heart is indeed a kind of book; but that is only a hint of the place in which human abilities meet and from which all human activities flow.<sup>6</sup>

### Reading with the Heart

After Augustine had picked up Paul’s letters to devastating and life-changing effect in a Milanese garden, he said, “I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away” (*Conf.* 8.12.29).<sup>7</sup> The impact of the scriptural Word was felt in his heart, and it later led him to appeal to the hearts of those who would read about his experience: “When the confession of my past evil deeds is read and listened to . . . that recital arouses the hearer’s heart, forbidding it to slump into despair” (*Conf.* 10.3.4). But his words also had an impact on him, as he wrote some years later: “As for myself, that is how they affected me when they were being written, and that is how they affect me when they are being read” (*Retr.* 2.6(33).1). Thus, “Augustine’s narrative suggests the need for an audience, a community of readers” (Jager: 42). To read with the heart is a deeply human activity, that is, a reading that is also an outreach, asking others, as it were, to use their hearts to read his heart. In fact, the story told in the *Confessions* makes sense only when it reaches out and touches others’ hearts.

Obviously, this paper has now moved beyond a description of the heart as a book or codex, as if it could be read with physical eyes. Augustine’s care for the self confirms a multi-dimensional role of the human heart. The heart is a chamber whose dimensions were described in the opening paragraphs of the *Confessions* as restless, cramped, and in need of cleansing, much more than a codex to be read. The heart is a place where the welcoming encounter can be celebrated and continued. As he wrote of “my heart,” in Book 10, “it is only there that I am whatever I am” (*Conf.* 10.3.4: *cor meum, ubi ego sum quicumque sum*). But he also understood

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<sup>6</sup> Solignac: 656: “Le cœur est dans l’homme “le point où se rencontrent toutes ses puissances et d’où rayonnent toutes ses activités.”

<sup>7</sup> See *Conf.* 8.8.19: “Within the house of my spirit the violent conflict raged on, the quarrel with my soul that I had so powerfully provoked in our secret dwelling, my heart.”

that he was needy and that there were still many questions<sup>8</sup> about the relationship between God and his heart.

### The Capacity of the Heart

Thus it is that, as part of his many questions at the very beginning of the *Confessions*, Augustine moves the question beyond everyday concerns to ask how, or even whether, he could welcome the immensity of God into the cramped confines of his heart:

What place is there in me into which my God may come? Where can God, the God who “made heaven and earth,” come into me? Is there anything in me, Lord, my God, that may contain you? . . . Do heaven and earth contain you if you fill them? . . . And when you pour yourself out over us, you are not emptied but you lift us up; you are not scattered but draw us together. Yet everything you fill, you fill with all of yourself. . . . Who will grant me to rest in you? Who will grant me that you may come into my heart and inebriate it? . . . The house of my soul is too small for you to enter: let it be expanded by your coming (*Conf.* 1.2.2; 1.3.3; 1.5.5; 1.5.6).<sup>9</sup>

Those lines from the prologue to the *Confessions* see the heart as a capacity for God; but that is not a fixed or static capacity (Madec). Rather – as the focus of the activity of God who pours himself over us (*effunderis super nos*)<sup>10</sup> – the heart is stretched by the very longing with which it extends itself toward God.<sup>11</sup> A holy desire is stimulated<sup>12</sup> and sustained by God:

They love the one who made heaven and earth; they love and are not yet with him. Their desire is kept waiting so that it may increase, and it increases that it may seize its object. It is not some small thing that God will give to desiring ones . . . not something that he made will be given but himself who made

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<sup>8</sup> Those many questions can be seen as *exercitationes mentis* where cascading concerns reach for understanding (see Otten; Claes).

<sup>9</sup> 1.2.2: *et quis locus est in me, quo ueniat in me Deus meus? Quo Deus ueniat in me, Deus, qui fecit caelum et terram? Itane, domine deus meus, est quidquam in me, quod capiat te?* 1.3.3: *capit ergone te caelum et terra, quoniam tu implet ea? . . . et cum effunderis super nos, non tu iaces, sed erigis nos, nec tu dissiparis, sed colligis nos. sed quae implet omnia, te toto implet omnia.* 1.5.5: *quis mihi dabit adquietere in te? quis dabit mihi, ut uenias in cor meum et inebries illud.* 1.5.6: *angusta est domus animae meae, quo uenias ad eam: dilatetur abs te.*

<sup>10</sup> Is this an allusion to Romans 5:5, where the love of God is poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit? That is likely.

<sup>11</sup> *Io eu. tr.* 63.1: *quaeramus (sc. deum) inueniendam, quaeramus inuentum . . . satiat enim quaerentem in quantum capit; et inuenientem capaciore facit ut rursus quaerat impleri, ubi plus capere coeperit* (see 94.5; 96.1; 98.2). It is stretched by prayer: *quid opus sit ipsa oratione, si deus jam fouit, quid nobis sit necessarium, nisi quia ipsa orationis intentio cor nostrum serenat et purgat capacius que efficit ad excipienda diuina munera, quae spiritaliter nobis infunduntur* (*S. dom. m.* 2.14). It is stretched by reflection or contemplation: *uerum disciplina catholica propterea simplici fide prius nutriri oportere docet mentem christianam, ut eam capacem faciat ad intellegenda superna et aeterna* (*C. Faust.* 12.46); *nec ego comprehendo: sed cogitatio facit nos extendi, extensio dilatata nos, dilatatio nos capaces facit* (*S.* 225.3); *Vult (Paulus) eos fide nutriri, ut capaces fiant participandorum thesaurorum sapientiae et scientiae, qui sunt absconditi in Christo* (*Ep.* 149.25; see Colossians 2:3).

<sup>12</sup> *Io eu. tr.* 40.10: *desiderium, sinus cordis est; capiemus, si desiderium quantum possumus extendamus . . . in modum tantae capacitatis augeatur, ut idoneum sit sumere quod oculus non uidit, nec auris audiuit, nec in cor hominis ascendit* (1 Corinthians 2:9); cf. *Io eu. tr.* 34.7, and the notes of M.-F. Berrouard (132 n. 37; 326sq. nn. 98-102); see also *En. Ps.* 37.14.

everything. Train yourself to have a capacity for God; yearn for what you will possess forever (*En. Ps.* 83.3).<sup>13</sup>

That training of the heart – the place where God lives – requires a return to the heart (*redi cor*) a basic part of the experience on Augustine’s road to conversion. His return to the heart was primarily about learning to welcome the God who wanted to make something more of him by his work on the heart – not, of course, as a mere physical organ, but as the yearning and longing that lies behind the famous words from the beginning of the *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you” (1.1.1).

This exploration, therefore, is not simply a question about the restlessness of the human condition or about Augustine’s dissatisfaction with his present state. Nor is it just a moral exhortation for greater personal effort. The thrust is more delicate and more interesting. God, by coming to the heart and by dwelling there, is the one who enlarges or stretches the heart; he even stimulates its desire – both by his coming and by his apparent absence. That which follows, in other words, is a study that centers its attention on the places where Augustine notices God’s action on the heart. Its content will be limited to that which he wrote prior to *Confessions*.

### The Heart as Expansive<sup>14</sup>

When he composed Book 9 of the *Confessions*, Augustine included several comments on Psalm 4 that harken back to the time when he left his work as rhetor and went with friends to Cassiciacum to prepare for baptism. At that time, he turned his attention to the healing power of praying the Psalms together,<sup>15</sup> and also spoke about how the prayer of the psalms had moved him at that time:

How I cried out to you in those psalms, how I was inflamed by them with love for you and I was on fire to recite them to the whole world, were I able, as a remedy against the pride of the human race! Yet they are sung throughout the world . . . What strong and bitter anger I felt against the Manichees, but my pity for them returned because they were ignorant of your remedies, the

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<sup>13</sup> *Amant enim qui fecit coelum et terram: amant, et nondum cum eo sunt. Desiderium eorum differtur, ut crescat; crescit, ut capiat. Non enim parvum aliquid daturus est Deus desideranti . . . non aliquid Deus quod fecit daturus est, sed seipsum qui fecit omnia. Ad capiendum Deum exercere; quod semper habiturus es diu desidera. Cf. S. Wilm. 11.8: differt (sc. Christus), non aufert, et in differendo quid agit? desiderio dilatai sinum animae . . . exercetur ergo capacitas tua dilatione boni; ut aucta desiderio, sis idoneus capere quo d promittit, et quod desideras; Io. eu. tr. 4.6: sic deus differendo extendit desiderium, desiderando extendit animum, extendendo facit capacem. desideremus ergo fratres, quia implendi sumus.*

<sup>14</sup> In the first chapter of his book, *La Joie spacieuse*, Jean-Luis Chrétien writes at some length about Augustine’s desire for God, a desire which was not only heartfelt but unflinching. Chrétien says that Augustine saw the gifts of the Holy Spirit – love, joy and peace – as signs of his capacity for God, a God who enlarges, expands, and stretches the human heart by his coming. The spiritual life, in other words, is a welcoming of the gifts of God rather than the result of merely personal effort. The welcoming or acceptance of an *other* was seen as that which made the strange familiar and turned the stranger into friend; this transformation of the heart was also seen as being sufficiently spacious for God to walk around (*deambulare*) (see esp. 32-63, on Augustine’s understanding of the stretching of the heart).

<sup>15</sup> That practice became common after the peace of Constantine when Christian communities had churches in which to pray.

sacraments. They were hostile toward the antidote which could have cured them (*Conf.* 9.4.8).<sup>16</sup>

Augustine wanted the whole world to see his utter abandon as he cried out to God, inflamed with love by the Psalms. Most especially he wanted the Manichees that he had known to see the expression on his face and the effect they had on his voice as he prayed for them, hoping that they might experience the transformation which the Psalms had wrought in him by singing the words outwardly and experiencing their truth inwardly. He gave voice to the transformation of his pain:

I wished that they had been somewhere nearby, without my knowing it, and had gazed upon my face and listened to my voice as I read the fourth psalm in that place of peace. “When I called on him he heard me, the God of my vindication; when I was in distress you stretched me” (*Conf.* 9.4.8).<sup>17</sup>

The effect of singing the psalm was visceral; he wanted to sing with every fiber of his being (*de medullis omnibus*); to sing from the heart (*tibi dixit cor meum*); to share his joy with God and with others. In this prayer, his distress and the stretching (*dilatare*) of his heart are tightly linked. In fact, the words of Psalm 4 helped him to understand what was happening. Although he did want his former friends to experience the same peace, his interpretation of this psalm focused on his own experience:

There, where I had grown angry with myself, there in the inner chamber where I was repentant, where I had offered sacrifice, slaying my old life and hoping in you, there I began to give my mind to the new life, there you had begun to make me feel your sweetness and had given me “gladness in my heart” (*Conf.* 9.4.10).<sup>18</sup>

The joy in his heart is the stretching, the outcome of having welcomed God; in other words, stretching and joy are intertwined. As he reflected back on what he was feeling and thinking in the days leading up to his baptism, this psalm helped him move beyond the frustration and anger with his inability to rise up from his old habits. But, pierced in his “inner chamber” by these words, he had “joy in his heart” (Psalm 4:7). His cramped heart had indeed been enlarged by the action of God who, he says, was the one who gave him that joy.<sup>19</sup> His

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<sup>16</sup> *quas tibi voces dabam in psalmis illis et quomodo in te inflammabar ex eis et accendebar eos recitare, si possem, toto orbe terrarum adversus typhum generis humani! Et tamen toto orbe cantantur . . . quam uebementi et acri dolore indignabar Manichaeis et miserabar eos rursus, quod illa sacramenta, illa medicamenta nescirent et insani essent aduersus antidotum, quo sani esse potuissent!*

<sup>17</sup> *uellem, ut alicubi iuxta essent tunc et me nesciente, quod ibi essent, intuerentur faciem meam et audirent uoces meas, quando legi quartum psalmum in illo tunc otio, quid de me fecerit ille psalmus: cum inuocarem te, exaudisti me Deus iustitiae meae; in tribulatione dilatasti mihi.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibi enim, ubi mihi iratus eram, intus in cubili, ubi compunctus eram, ubi sacrificaveram mactans vetustatem meam, et inchoata meditatione renovationis meae sperans in te, ibi mihi dulcescere coeperas et dederas laetitiam in corde meo.*

<sup>19</sup> A similar emphasis is found in *Conf.* 13.25.40, but he places that verse of the psalm on Paul’s lips, in connection with the apostle’s words of gratitude to the Philippians for their ministry to him (Philippians 4:10-18): “This is what he rejoices over, and on this he feeds, that they have acted well, not that his own distress has been alleviated. ‘When I was in distress you stretched me,’ he says to you, because he has learned to withstand both abundance and penury in you, who strengthen him.”

acceptance of the presence and work of God in his heart, therefore, was a much more perceptive appreciation of what had transpired – no mere personal exercise of his will.

It can, of course, be asked whether or not Augustine could have talked about his experience in this way at the time of his conversion. But it is at least clear that, by the time was a priest in Hippo, he had come to appreciate that the joy in his life – the expanded heart – was a gift of God. That is confirmed by the connection he made between prayer and the stretching of the heart in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, that is, from a few years before he wrote the *Confessions*. Once again, Augustine recognized that God was the one who acted to transform him:

What need is there for this prayer since God already knows what is necessary for us? What need if not because the enacting of pray calms and purifies our heart and makes it more capacious for receiving divine gifts which are spiritually poured into us (*S. dom. m.* 2.14).

In each case, Augustine has offered a snapshot of the action of God in his heart. His growth – a movement from a cramped heart to an experience of joy – is described (and presumably felt) as having expanded or stretched the heart. Is it possible to describe more fully what Augustine meant by this way of speaking? Another text that was written at about this time – his commentary on Psalm 4 – will show that this experience was significant for Augustine.

### Heart in the Exposition of Psalm 4<sup>20</sup>

In 393 CE, the North African bishops gathered in Hippo for a council, and Augustine was asked to offer an instruction on the faith. Afterwards, at the suggestion of some of the bishops, he began to compose works that were intended specifically for the church in North Africa. Among those works was his commentaries on the first 32 psalms, and the commentary on Psalm 4 would have been from about 394. That psalm, in its second verse, makes the connection between distress and growth or stretching, supporting that understanding by citing Paul's letter to the Romans 5:3-5. Augustine said:

“When I called on him he heard me, the God of my salvation.” When I called, God, from whom my salvation derives, heard me, says the psalmist. “In distress, you stretched me,” that is, from the cramped conditions of sorrow you have led me to the breadth of joys. For sorrow and distress beset the soul of everyone who does evil; but Paul says: “We even rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering fosters endurance,” right to the point where he ends, “because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5). He does not have contractions in the heart, even though they are imposed by outside persecutors (*En. Ps.* 4.2).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Dulacy: 51. It was probably written in 394 CE. The study of the commentary on Psalm 4 refers briefly to other places where Augustine interprets that psalm: Book 9 of the *Confessions* and *S. Dolbeau* 16.6-18.

<sup>21</sup> *cum innocarem, exaudivit me deus iustitiae meae. cum innocarem, exaudivit me deus, inquit, a quo est iustitia mea. in tribulatione dilatasti mihi. ab angustiis tristitiae, in latitudinem gaudiorum me duxisti. tribulatio enim et angustia in omnem animam hominis*

The fact that Paul's heart is not narrowed by the experience of persecution is set in parallel with his own movement from the experience of sorrow to the wideness (*latitudo*) of joys. Explaining that movement in terms of Paul's language in Romans 5:5 – a verse that is cited three times in this commentary – does keep the distinction between God's action and human action clear. Pouring his love into human hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is a passage which, in these early years, is used against the Manichees and the Donatists (La Bonnardière: 659). Is the reference to persecutors only related to Paul's time? It is entirely possible that Augustine's mention of persecutors was also part of his experience in Hippo at that time.

That biblical passage which sets the tone for this and for later places where Augustine will speak about the expanding of the heart – a change that Augustine will also discuss from the point of view of the shift that the psalmist makes from speaking *about* God's action to speaking directly *to* God. The change from third person to second person leads Augustine to write:

There is a change of person, a sudden shift from the third, where the psalmist says, "He heard," to the second, where he says, "you stretched me." If it was not done for the sake of variety and elegance, I wonder why he wanted in the first case to say that he had been heard, and in the second to address the one who heard him. Perhaps it indicated that, having been heard in the very enlargement of his heart, he then preferred to talk with God so as to show in this way what it means that the heart is enlarged, that is, having God poured into our hearts means that we can converse inwardly with him (*En. Ps. 4.2*).<sup>22</sup>

The outpouring of God's love, Augustine says, makes it possible "to converse inwardly" with God. In Hippo, Augustine lived in a city whose Christians were mostly Donatists and whose leaders were not exactly friendly. Not long after his ordination, Augustine wrote a letter to his bishop where he acknowledged that his new role "now torments and crushes me" (*Ep. 21.3: quale me nunc torquet et conterit*; see Fitzgerald). It is possible that he is referring to the opposition of Donatist leaders, but it may not be that precise. The sorrow and distress that he faced, however, was the occasion for greater effort; it could refer to many things, whether to his conversion in the Milanese garden, to his experiences with Manichees or Donatists, or to the challenges of pastoral ministry.

But the effect of God's action on the heart is a response both to the relationship with God and to the experience of distress. Instead of keeping the focus on the problems that he was facing, his interior conversation with God became the focus, and, therefore, his heart is no longer cramped. He is open, rather, to learning from trial, just as Paul had taught: "We even rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering fosters endurance" (Romans 5:3).

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*operantis malum. qui autem dicit: gaudemus in tribulationibus, scientes quoniam tribulatio patientiam operatur, usque ad illud ubi ait: quoniam caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis, non habet cordis angustias, quamvis extrinsecus a persequentibus ingerantur.*

<sup>22</sup> *mutatio autem personae, quod a tertia, ubi ait exaudivit, statim transiit ad secundam, ubi ait dilatasti mihi, si non uarietatis ac suauitatis causa facta est, mirum cur primum tamquam indicare uoluit hominibus exaudivit se esse, et postea compellere exauditoem suum. nisi forte cum indicasset quemadmodum exaudivit sit in ipsa dilatatione cordis, maluit cum deo loqui, ut etiam hoc modo ostenderet quid sit corde dilatari, id est, iam cordi habere infusum deum, cum quo intrinsecus colloquatur.*



Augustine also makes sure that the experience of distress not be seen in merely personal terms. He had to interpret this psalm in relation to the members of the body of Christ:

This is rightly understood as referring to a person who, believing in Christ, has been enlightened. I do not see how this can be applied to the person of the Lord-Man whom the wisdom of God took to himself. For he was not at any time abandoned by that wisdom. But as his own plea is rather an indicator of our infirmity, so also can the same Lord speak for his faithful when the psalmist speaks about the sudden enlarging of the heart. The Lord took their person upon himself when he said, “I was hungry, and you did not feed me; I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink,” and so forth (Matthew 25:42). That is why here too he can say, “you stretched me,” speaking on behalf of one of his littlest ones who converses with God and has God’s charity poured into his heart through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (*En. Ps.* 4.2).<sup>23</sup>

Human distress, in other words, is seen by Augustine as a stimulus to a greater intimacy with God. The first lines of his commentary on this paragraph sees that development as liberating: “from the cramped conditions of sorrow you have led me to the breadth of joys.” Chrétien comments:

While the oppressive attacks of sadness take many different forms, they always lead to the same monotonous limitation of living. The opening of an expansive joy, however, takes place in a single act and in one person, even while these joys can only be many, diverse and always new because they are heavy with renewal (48).

Looking back to Augustine’s first experience of this psalm makes it clear that something significant has changed in the way he prays it. At that time, he did not dwell at all on distress nor did he cite Paul. Rather – as he recounts the experience in the *Confessions* – he read it as a prayer for the Manichees in his hope that they could see and hear him singing the words of the psalm. In this case, the focus is not on the prayer but on the fact that the experience of distress leads to change:

“Have mercy on me, and listen to my prayer.” Why does he ask again, when he has already made it clear that he has been heard and enlarged? Is it perhaps for our sakes when he says, “If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience” (Romans 8:25)? Or is it so that what has begun in the one who believes may be brought to fruition? (*En. Ps.* 4.2).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *quod in persona eius qui credens in Christum illuminatus est, recte accipitur; in ipsius autem dominici hominis, quem suscepit dei sapientia, non uideo quemadmodum hoc possit congruere. non enim ab ea aliquando desertus est. sed quemadmodum ipsa eius deprecatio, nostrae potius infirmitatis indicium est, sic etiam de ista repentina dilatatione cordis potest idem dominus pro fidelibus suis loqui, quorum personam sibi imposuit etiam cum ait: esuriui, et non cibastis me; sitiui, et potum non dedistis mihi, et cetera. quare hic quoque potest dicere dilatasti mihi, pro uno ex minimis suis colloquente cum deo, cuius caritatem diffusam habet in corde per spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis.*

<sup>24</sup> *miserere mei, et exaudi orationem meam. cur iterum rogat, cum iam se exauditum et dilatatum indicauerit? an propter nos, de quibus dicitur: si autem quod non uidemus speramus, per patientiam expectamus; aut ut in illo qui credidit perficiatur quod inchoatum est?*

Thus does he highlight the patience in a person in distress that will bear fruit – and, presumably, it was precisely his experience as a priest in Hippo that changed and deepened his appreciation of the words of this psalm – both because of the stress of the division between Catholics and Donatists and because of the growth in a Catholic community that was renewing its faith and its place in society. He reinforces his attention to the growth that comes from distress in what he says about the verse, “How long will you be heavy-hearted? The Lord will listen to me, when I cry to him.”<sup>25</sup> Augustine wrote:

I believe that here we are being admonished to call for God’s help with great earnestness of heart, that is, internally and not bodily. This is because, just as we should give thanks for the light God sheds on this life, so we should pray for rest after this life. Whether this is said in the person of a faithful preacher of the gospel, or by the Lord himself, we are to take it thus: “The Lord will hear you, when you cry to him” (*En. Ps.* 4.5).<sup>26</sup>

The appeal to prayer from the heart continues, pointing toward the next life. It applies both to a faithful preacher or to the person of Christ, that is, to his body; both will be heard. Augustine then emphasizes the dynamic aspects of the distress-growth relationship when he comments at some length on the words that follow: “Be angry, and do not sin. What you say, in your hearts. Be pierced in your own rooms.”

“What you say, say it in your hearts!” That is, do not be the people of whom scripture says, “With their lips they honor me, but their heart is far from me” (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6). “Be remorseful in your own rooms.” This means the same as the phrase used already, “in your hearts”; it refers to the inner room of which the Lord too advises us: he tells us to pray within, the doors firmly closed. The command, “Be remorseful,” may refer to the pain of repentance which the soul inflicts on itself by way of punishment, lest it be condemned and tormented by God’s judgment; or else “be remorseful” is a wake-up call, prompting us to rise from sleep as though prodded with goads, so as to see the light of Christ. But some say that “be opened” rather than “be remorseful” is the better reading, because in the Greek psalter the word *κατανοήγητε* refers to the stretching of the heart which makes it open to receive the love shed abroad by the Holy Spirit (*En. Ps.* 5.6).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine’s text of Psalm 4:5 reads: *irascimini et nolite peccare quae dicitis in cordibus vestris in cubilibus vestris compungimini diapsalma.*

<sup>26</sup> *hic nos admoneri credo, ut magna intentione cordis, id est, interno et incorporeo clamore auxilium imploremus dei. quoniam sicut gratulandum est de illuminatione in hac uita, ita orandum pro requie post hanc uitam. quapropter aut ex persona fidelis euangelizantis, aut ex ipsius domini, sic accipiendum est ac si dictum sit: dominus exaudiet uos, dum clamaueritis ad eum.*

<sup>27</sup> *Quae dicitis, in cordibus vestris dicitis; id est, nolite esse populus de quo dictum est: Labiis me honorant, cor autem eorum longe est a me. In cubilibus vestris compungimini: hoc est quod iam dictum est, in cordibus; haec enim sunt cubilia de quibus et Dominus monet, ut intus oremus clausis ostiis. Compungimini autem, aut ad poenitentiae dolorem refertur, ut se ipsam anima puniens compungat, ne in Dei iudicio damnata torqueatur; aut ad excitationem, ut evigilemus ad videndam lucem Christi, tamquam stimulis adhibitis. Nonnulli autem non compungimini, sed aperimini, dicunt melius legi; quoniam in graeco Psalterio est κατανοήγητε, quod refertur ad illam dilatationem cordis, ut excipiat diffusio caritatis per Spiritum sanctum.*

Suffering and sorrow not only pierce the heart but they help to bring about self-reflection from within. There is a kind of stretching which may be called an expansion, an enlarging, or a broadening – all of which lead to an opening to Christ, to the light of Christ. It is, once again, the action of the Holy Spirit on the heart that makes the difference. Then, commenting on v. 7, Augustine sums up:

“You have given joy to my heart.” So joy is not to be sought outside oneself, by those who, still heavy in heart, love emptiness and chase falsehood. It is, rather, to be sought within, where the light of God's face is stamped. For Christ dwells in the inner person, as the apostle says; for seeing the truth belongs to Christ, for he said, “I am truth” (John 14:6). When the apostle asked, “Do you presume to interrogate Christ, who speaks in me?” (2 Corinthians 13:3), Christ did not speak to him outwardly, but within him, in his very heart, in that inner room where prayer takes place (*En. Ps.* 4.8).<sup>28</sup>

It is true that other parts of the commentary of Psalm 4 could be added to this analysis, but this much has already shown that the contrast between this explanation and the commentary found in Book 9 of the *Confessions* is significant. Further reflection on the stretching of the heart will be found in later works of Augustine.<sup>29</sup> Thus is the *dilatatio cordis* described as the joy which manifests the presence of grace. That joy is seen as “the hospitality where the two meanings of *hôte* (host and guest) cannot be distinguished” (Chrétien: 62) In other words, divine initiative and human responsiveness are intertwined in beautifully mysterious ways – one example of how Augustine’s meditation on the Scriptures was continually enriched.

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<sup>28</sup> *dedisti laetitiam in cor meum. non ergo foris quaerenda est laetitia, ab his qui adhuc graues corde diligunt uanitatem et quaerunt mendacium, sed intus ubi signatum est lumen uultus dei. in interiore enim homine habitat Christus, ut ait apostolus; ad ipsum enim pertinet uidere ueritatem, cum ille dixerit: ego sum ueritas. et cum loquebatur in apostolo dicente: an uultis experimentum eius accipere qui in me loquitur Christus? non ei foris utique, sed in ipso corde, id est, in illo cubili ubi orandum est, loquebatur.*

<sup>29</sup> That meditation can be continued and deepened by the study of *S.* 23; *S.* 163; *S.* 169; *S.* 225; *S. Dolbeau* 27; as well as *En. Ps.* 59; 103; 118; 133.

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