Luigi Alici

Initium omnis operis verbum.
On the semantics of *opus/operari*
in Augustine

1. Sphere of inquiry

A well established hermeneutic approach (one obviously supported by solid findings on the textual and categorial level) tends to place the speculative center of gravity of Augustine's thought *in interiore homine*, and consequently to denigrate the entire spectrum of the exterior world, understood not only as cosmological and natural horizon, external to man's life, but also as the tangible product of his practical action in history. In a direct corollary of this approach, it follows that the primacy of interiority necessarily posits a demotion of the exterior, both in its natural and in its moral order. The general objective of this study is to demonstrate that the second thesis does not necessarily follow from the first.

In order to achieve this objective, our inquiry will focus on an extremely circumscribed thematic aspect, leaving in the background a broader and more detailed reflection developed in other contributions[1]. The strategic centrality of the notion of *intentio* in Augustine makes it possible to re-articulate in dialectical terms the psycho-physical unity of the human subject, in which the very form of the body-soul relationship is not manifested in terms of spatial extension, but of vital tension: «Per totum quippe corpus quod animat, non locali diffusione, sed quadam vitali intentione porrigitur»[2]. Within this perspective, all of human life can be interpreted as the fruit of equilibrium of *exterior*, *interior*, and *superior*, marked by solidarity, if not by historic stability. Considered in this context, the exterior dimension also takes on anthropological pertinence, above all if inter-

---

[1] Among these, we limit ourselves to mentioning an inquiry into Augustine's thought, directed at reasserting the dynamic character, in the reflective and inter-subjective sense, of the notion of interiority, that substitutes the Platonic and neoplatonic paradigm, traceable to the spatial paradigm of the "position" with a new paradigm, formulated according to the temporal model of the "movement": cf. L. ALICI, *L'altro nell'io. In dialogo con Agostino*, Città Nuova, Roma 1999, pp. 263-289.

[2] AUGUSTINUS, *ep.* 166, 4.

preted not as *terminus a quo*, in which the interior asserts itself as a centripetal and antagonistic force, but rather as *terminus ad quem* in which the ordered dynamism of the rational creature is expressed and incarnated.

This essay intends to analyze one of the notions with which Augustine expresses this *terminus ad quem*, that is, the thematic plexus of *opus/operari*, hosting a family of particularly relevant meanings. The essay continues a previous inquiry that sought to explore the internal bond between the beginning of being and the genesis of meaning[3]. Augustine interprets this bond according to a dialectic of *verbum* and *opus*, significantly traced to their common anthropological matrix. For Augustine, the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, the central event of the Christian mystery of salvation, offers the fundamental analogy between divine and human acts: «Aussi n'est-il pas possibile de décrire la parole humaine seloin saint Augustin sans prêter attention aux actes de la Parole divine»[4]. The most immediate reflection of this analogy is manifested in the dialectic of visible and invisible, which is at the origin of inter-human communication[5], precisely on the basis of an *ex operibus* mediation.

Beginning with this horizon of understanding, an exploration of the semantics of *opera/operari* must take into consideration a series of preliminary qualifications.

First of all, a methodological qualification is required. This theme's treatment is fragmented and dispersed throughout Augustine's immense production, and one must patiently seek the traces of some sudden flashes (of which Augustine, like every truly great author, is not stingy), that illuminate the most hidden weft and woof of his thought, allowing glimpses of unexpected profundities. However, there are certain writings that afford more direct work, in particular, *De fide et operibus* and *De opere monachorum*, along with the splendid commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.

A second qualification should be made on the epistemological level. As is well known, Augustine develops his approach to many questions by interweaving a complexity of levels, making a formal distinction between theology and philosophy very problematic (and anachronistic). For Augustine, as such an authoritative and attentive interpreter as Goulven Madec has reminded us more than once, philosophy is essentially *amor* or *studium sapientiae*, and thus an ideal of life that cannot be reduced to this or that school of thought, but is com-

---

[3] Cf. L. ALICI, *L'énigme de l'origine et la genèse du sens*. The paper was presented at the Internatio-nal Colloquium on "Saint Augustin et la Bible", organized by the "Centre de Recherche en Theologie" (University of Metz, April 7-8, 2005) and is in press, edited by the Centre.

[4] J.-L. CHRÉTIEN, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole*, PUF, Paris 2002, p. 9.

[5] «Ecce verbum latet, sonum patet; impono latentem super patentem, et pervenio ad audientem» (AUGUSTINUS, *s*. 223/A, 2 [Denis 2]).

pletely fulfilled in Christ, the true «virtus et sapientia Dei»[6]. On the other hand, theology was too tied to the polytheistic doctrinal apparatus of the pagan world, for Augustine to engage in the process as a real interlocutor. Notwithstanding this fundamental caveat, our analysis will attempt to bring to the forefront above all the terminological and conceptual weft and woof of the theme, keeping in the background the reference to the datum revealed and the more specifically theological implications of the relationship between faith and works.

Finally, a third qualification concerns the lexical sphere: *opus/operari* in Augustine is a lemma of multiple meanings, distributed on a very wide semantic scale, ranging from its most banal and obvious use, where it also crops up as a synonym for literary work, to the highest dogmatic acceptation, containing an original Trinitarian characteristic. On the other hand, at times our Author uses the term, as he does with other synonymous terms (beginning with *factum/facere*) as *vox media*, thus open to different, even opposing values. In the light of these difficulties, the semantics of *opus/operari* can be explored in its ethical-anthropological significance if traced to a broader ontological and metaphysical background.

This approach therefore cannot be aridly philological (even though a supplementary inquiry in this sense would be extremely useful for understanding the lexical and doctrinal sources of Augustinian thought), but must seek to intercept the most secret and profound movement of his research, without sacrificing a global approach that sets into circulation the part and the whole. Few authors have suffered more than Augustine from selective and partial readings that have extrapolated affirmations taken out of context, drawing from them questionable and over-hasty interpretations.

Thus I will try to develop the analysis in three distinct moments: first of all, I would like to touch upon several foundational thematic lines that keep in mind the whole of Augustine's production; in a second moment, I will attempt to outline a closer comparison with the three works just mentioned; and finally, I will try to draw a few critical conclusions.

2. The semantics of *opus*

In order to lay out a general investigation of the lemma *opus/operari*, it would be well to begin by distinguishing at least three distinct levels of analysis, con-

---

[6] Cf. Augustinus, *conf*. 3, 4, 7-8. In this regard, cf. G. Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie. Notes critiques*, Institut des Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1996, pp. 16-24. Cf. also G. Catapano, *Il concetto di filosofia nei primi scritti di Agostino. Analisi dei passi metafilosofici dal "Contra Academicos" al "De vera religione"*, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome 2001.

cerning the metaphysical foundation, the anthropological statute, and the ethical prominence of the problem.

2.1. In terms of the first aspect, it is important to remember that our Author sees the dynamic of *operari* in a very broad context, which originally embraces the Trinitarian communion itself, and then is taken up as the source of the creative act and that of the "second creation" made possible by the incarnation of Christ, in the light of which, finally, it can better illuminate the process of historical incarnation of human action.

When Augustine reflects on the foundation of the Divine plan of salvation, he asserts in no uncertain words, against the Arians: «Inseparabilia quippe sunt opera Trinitatis»[7]. The Trinitarian "operations" do not concern only the level of the theology of redemption, but even more radically, the level of the theology of creation. The "working" of the Trinity is thus the original constitutive foundation of human working: «Si ergo Deus est qui operatur in nobis, quare dictum est: Vestram ipsorum salutem operamini? Quia sic in nobis operatur, ut et nos operemur». God works in us in such a way that we too must work: «Quia sic in nobis operatur, ut et nos operemur»[8]. From here a horizon opens out that interprets human working analogically, as a form of finite participation in the divine work, in the context of a universe perceived at its root as *opus creationis* and that thus saves the human being from all forms of ontological disorientation. Here we are poles apart from the modern and late-modern concept described by Max Weber as "disenchantment with the world".

For Augustine, the works of man are not solitary events that happen in a naturally "neutral" space (as various Greek cosmological doctrines would have it) nor (even less so) the fruit of a dramatic competition against a refractory or even aggressively hostile universe (as various Gnostic doctrines represented it):

«Non versor in operibus quae Deus non fecit. Laudent ergo Creatorem omnia opera sua. Invenio hic coaevum, cognosco ibi coaeternum. Hic aequalitatem invenio naturae, ibi intellego aequalitatem substantiae»[9].

Thus the created universe is precisely the fulcrum of a dialectic between *coaevum* and *coaeternum* in which from the *aequalitas naturae* the human being is sent on to seek a superior form of metaphysical participation (*aequalitas substantiae*).

Hence for a humanity anthropologically destabilized by guilt, on the level of

[7] Augustinus, *C. serm. Arian.* 4, 4.

[8] Augustinus, *s.* 13, 3.

[9] Augustinus, *s.* 117, 10, 14.

knowledge even before that of action, the salvific mediation of Christ becomes decisive. In a catechetical writing, the Author affirms that the work of Christ in an exemplary sense is the cross, which assigns a direction and a task to the works of man, beyond which the resurrection is announced:

> «Ibi opus, quia crucifixus; exemplum operis, crux; premium operis, resurrectio [...] Prorsus tam quam agonotheta summum, dixit: Fac, et tolle; fac opus, et accipe praemium; certa in agone, et coronaberis. Quid est opus? Oboedientia. Quod est praemium? Resurrectio sine morte»[10].

In this text, Christ is not a traditional master who transmits an esoteric *corpus* of doctrines, destined for an intellectually selective audience. His *divina auctoritas* teaches «et factis [...] et praeceptione»[11]. Alongside the exterior word (*locutio, praeceptio*), the works of Christ, enclosed in His life and culminating in the resurrection, become a single sacramental event of salvation[12], against the background of a vision of the Bible and of creation understood as *sacramentum*.

Precisely in virtue of this sacramentality, the exterior word of the evangelical annunciation is able to make us become faithful followers of Christ, the ultimate principle of intelligibility. Thus the word *verbum* yields a dual import: on the level of *dicere*, it mediates a *doctrina*, while on the level of *facere*, it mediates the divine power[13]:

> «Quod graece λόγος dicitur, latine et rationem et verbum significat. Sed hoc loco melius verbum interpretamur, ut significetur non solum ad Patrem respectus, sed ad illa etiam quae per Verbum facta sunt operativa potentia»[14].

For this reason, according to Augustine, Saint Paul wrote that Christ is *virtus et sapientia Dei*: «Quod dixerunt Judaei, Unde huic sapientia haec et virtutes? Sapientia in his quae loquebatur, virtutes in his quae operabatur»[15]. Here one

---

[10] AUGUSTINUS, *symb. cat.* 3, 9.

[11] AUGUSTINUS, *ord.* 2, 9, 27.

[12] According to Studer, the Augustinian exegesis, above all *De doctrina Christiana*, is oriented toward the search for the *res fidei* and the *res charitatis*: «Le premiére aspecte de cette finalité – writes Studer – correspond au fond au *sacramentum*. Il s'agit, en effet, de trouver dans la Bible, c'est-à-dire, surtotut dans l'Ancien Testament, le Christ et l'Église, le choses à croire, les moyens de purification, le *sacramentum*. Le second aspect, par contre, la recherche de l'amour de Dieu et du prochain, relève particulièrement de l'*exemplum*, puisqu'il est question des choses utiles à la vie, des exigences à réaliser, des modèles à suivre» (B. STUDER, *"Sacramentum et exemplum" chez saint Augustin*, «Recherches Augustiniennes», 10 (1975), p. 123).

[13] Cf. R. HOLTE, *Béatitude et sagesse. Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne*, French translation, Études augustiniennnes, Paris 1962, pp. 339-340; cf. also pp. 161 and 326.

[14] AUGUSTINUS, *div. qu.* 63.

[15] AUGUSTINUS, *qu. ev.* 1, 14.

marks well the distance separating Augustine, the pastor and bishop, from the ingenuous spiritualistic optimism in the dialogues of the *Cassiciacum*.

As will be said also further on, alongside the *sobrietas contemplandi* that characterizes the Christian search for *sapientia*, increasingly in the forefront is the *agendi efficacia* that announces itself as an indispensable complement of *virtus*. Therefore, for Augustine one can speak – *a parte hominis*, certainly not *a parte Dei* – of a divine working, that is not simply an incorrect projection of human working, but constitutes its originating foundation. Starting from here, then, there can be the generation of the entire volume of the multiple works of man, his practical activities, expressed in historically visible forms that are determined practically and orientable teleologically.

2.2. On this basis, it makes sense to inquire, on the anthropological level, about the conditions of possibility of this operative dynamism, even before considering its nature and purpose. Here we must once again start from the Trinitarian analogy, which intervenes decisively in speculatively qualifying the dialectic of *verbum* and *opus*. In fact, on the human level as well, every dynamic that can be read according to a Trinitarian framework contains, though according to different levels[16], a feature of approximation analogous to that perfection; consequently, the phenomenon of the genesis of meaning and the genesis of the work have a common root, no matter how insurmountably limited they are by the infinite metaphysical difference established by the creation. In fact, while the Word of God is the Son of God, and the Son of God is the true God and eternal life, as John[17] teaches, in the interior man «verbum esse sine cogitatione non potest»[18]; the *verbum* expresses the genesis of meaning, which rises to the surface and articulates itself in the interval joining the potentiality implicit of *nosse* with the explicit current nature of *cogitare*:

> «Ac per hoc quando ad se ipsam cogitatione convertitur, fit trinitas, in qua iam et verbum possit intellegi: formatur quippe ex ipsa cogitatione, voluntate utrumque iungente»[19].

Even though one can use *verbum* in various acceptations[20], according to Au-

---

[16] The fundamental distinction is between the Trinitarian structure to be found in the *homo exterior* (*res*, *species corporis*, *voluntas*; *memoria*, *interna visio*, *voluntas*), which can only be seen as a *vestigium Trinitatis* for its perceptive and temporal nature and that which emerges in the spiritual interiority (*esse*, *nosse*, *velle*; *mens*, *notitia*, *amor*; *memoria*, *intellegentia*, *voluntas*), which is not *adventicia*, but rises to the value of indelible *imago* of God, permitting us to meet Him *per speculum et aenigmate*.

[17] Cf. Augustinus, *trin*. 1, 12, 26. The reference is to 1 John 5:20.

[18] Augustinus, *trin*. 14, 7, 10.

[19] Augustinus, *trin*. 14, 10, 13.

[20] In fact, Augustine distinguishes *verbum* as synonym of the exterior word («quae spatia temporum

gustine it literally expresses the act of mental generation of meaning, the fruit of a reflective actualization of those spiritual virtualities in which one can trace an *imago* of the divine Trinity:

> «Cum itaque se mens novit et amat, iungitur ei amore verbum eius. Et quoniam amat notitiam et novit amorem, et verbum in amore est et amor in verbo, et utrumque in amante atque dicente»[21].

Augustine loves to define this act as a form of generation, not spontaneous, but rather ultimately motivated by the *voluntas*, which is the form of human love established and certified by assent[22]. In the *domicilium cogitationis*, beyond which there opens out a vertiginous metaphysical background («abstrusior profunditas nostrae memoriae»), the act of thought goes so far as to make us discover that originary root, in which the intimate verb is generated, which belongs to no language («et gignitur intimum verbum, quod nullius linguae sit»), as a knowledge that comes from a knowledge, a vision that comes from a vision, an intelligence that manifests itself in thought, and comes from an intelligence already present in memory, but still hidden («quae in memoria iam fuerat, sed latebat»)[23].

At the root of the spiritual life, therefore, thought emerges as "word of the heart" («Quaedam ergo cogitationes locutiones sunt cordis»[24]), the sign of a felt belonging that finds its expression in the external modulation of *vox*:

> «verbum quod foris sonat, signum est verbi quod intus lucet, cui magis verbi competit nomen»[25].

Thus the "externalization" of the interior word does not consist in giving "linguistic clothing" to a formless thought: *cogitare* is already in and of itself a passage from the prelinguistic to the linguistic, that is, to an articulate unity of meaning, in terms of which *nosse* indicates the condition of possibility and *vox* the further stage of the discursive actualization. In other words, the *verbum* belongs to the transcendental horizon of language, the *vox* to the empirical horizon of a tongue[26]. If speaking is the way in which we articulate and form thought,

---

syllabis tenent»), as unity of interiorized meaning («omne quod notum est [...] animo impressum»), and as free mental conception («cum placet quod mente concipitur») (Augustinus, *trin*. 9, 10, 15).

[21] Augustinus, *trin*. 9, 10, 15.

[22] Cf. in this regard D. Pagliacci, *Volere e amare. Agostino e la conversione del desiderio*, Città Nuova, Rome 2003.

[23] Augustinus, *trin*. 15, 21, 40.

[24] Augustinus, *trin*. 15, 10, 18.

[25] Augustinus, *trin*. 15, 11, 20.

[26] «Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus, verbum est quod in corde dicimus; quod nec grae-

thinking is the foundation of possibility or the principle of speaking[27]. In the *Confessiones*, distinguishing among the four different forms of precedence (*aeternitate*, *tempore*, *electione*, *origine*), Augustine had indicated the first and last as the most difficult[28]; in fact, compared to the second and third forms, which respectively identify a precedence in the chronological and axiological sense, the first expresses a true ontological difference, marked by the absoluteness of the foundation, while the last can be interpreted as a difference of genetic-transcendental order, invoked to express the priority of unformed matter over the formed creatures; in fact, it does not precede them in time, but only as its genetic condition[29].

Perhaps we do not stray too far from the Author's intention if in this way we also understand the spiritual generation of the work, whose origin therefore is not of an empirical order; the articulation of thinking and working is originally linguistic, and its condition of possibility is metalinguistic. The distance between saying and doing is drastically reduced here: both dimensions attest to the same dynamic of incarnation. What qualifies each human working is that it is an expression of an *operative potential*, even though only at an ontologically differentiated level from the one proper to the *verbum Dei*[30].

In a very dense text in *De Trinitate* Augustine invites readers to search in the interior *verbum* also for the foundation, both ontological and axiological, of the *opus*. In fact, only the *verbum verum* is the condition of possibility and the standard of judgment of the *opus bonum*. Therefore, interior truth is the measure of our being and of our working; the *verbum intus manens* is the condition of possibility of discourse and work:

> «Nihil itaque agimus per membra corporis in factis dictisque nostris, quibus vel approbantur vel improbantur mores hominum, quod non verbo apud nos intus edito praevenimus. Nemo enim aliquid volens facit, quod non in corde suo prius dixerit»[31].

---

cum est, nec latinum, nec linguae alicuius alterius; sed cum id opus est in eorum quibus loquimur perferre notitiam, aliquod signum quo significetur assumitur» (Augustinus, *trin*. 15, 10, 19).

[27] Cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Zu Augustins Metaphysik der Sprache*, «Augustinian Studies», 2 (1971), pp. 179-195.

[28] Augustine also reasserts it unequivocally in *Gn. litt*. 1, 15, 29.

[29] The author provides an example: «aeternitate, sicut Deus omnia; tempore, sicut flos fructum; electione, sicut fructus florem; origine, sicut sonus cantum» (Augustinus, *conf*. 12, 29, 40).

[30] In *De fide et symbolo* Augustine reminds us that we can also present Christ as the visible sign of God, as long as it is clear that «inter animum autem nostrum et verba nostra, quibus eumdem animum ostendere conamur, plurimum distat [...]. Deus vero cum Verbum genuit, id quod est ipse genuit» (Augustinus, *f. et symb*. 3, 4).

[31] Augustinus, *trin*. 9, 7, 12.

Here the Christological analogy is decisive:

«Et sicut verbum nostrum fit vox, nec mutatur in vocem; ita Verbum Dei caro quidem factum est, sed absit ut mutaretur in carnem»[32].

In addition, since everything was created through Christ, one can also say that «hominis opera nulla sunt, quae non prius dicantur in corde»[33], just as Scripture teaches, according to which, «initium omnis operis verbum» (Sirach 37:20). Precisely in the same way that the dependence of creatures on the Word of God is univocal, not reciprocal, so the *opus* cannot be without the *verbum*, while there can be *verbum* not followed by *opus*. In any case, the *verbum verum* is at the basis of the *scientia bene operandi*. In this way, contemplative life and active life have their unifying root in the incarnation of Christ.

The metaphysical theme of difference, which Plotinus had placed at the center of the re-reading of Platonism, intending it as the distancing of the multiple from the One, transcribed within a Trinitarian framework, is now liberated from any devolutionary interpretation: in the divine life, the Trinity does not represent a fall from unity, but the culmination of its perfection[34]. The arising of word and action is not a rupture of unity, but the enigmatic and finite reflection of an infinitely higher unity.

2.3. The various contributions on the nature and purpose of human working find their setting in this perspective: the human being, too, is characterized by the *operative potential* that is the true root of every factually determined work. From this point of view, there is a radical re-evaluation, first of all, of any presumed dichotomy between faith and works (as we will see more clearly further on): the primacy of faith, in fact, must not cause us to forget that faith itself is a work of God («ipsam quoque fidem opus Dei dicit esse Iesus»[35]). Thus, saying that we are justified by faith means that faith is given first, and that from it works follow: «ipsa prima datur, ex qua impetrentur cetera, quae proprie opera nuncupantur, in quibus iuste vivitur»[36].

In this sense, the altruistic drive of *caritas* cannot remain indifferent to the

---

[32] AUGUSTINUS, *trin*. 15, 11, 20. The theme recurs often: «Sicut enim sonus, quo auditur sententia in silentio intellegentiae constituta, non est hoc quod ipsa: ita et species, qua visus est Deus in natura invisibili constitutus, non erat quod ipse» (AUGUSTINUS, *civ*. 10,13).

[33] AUGUSTINUS, *trin*. 15, 11, 20.

[34] Also P. AUBIN (*Plotin et le christianisme. Triade plotinienne et Trinité chrétienne*, Beauchesne, Paris 1992) rightly warns against excesses in aligning the Christian Trinity and a poorly understood Plotinian doctrine of the "three hypostases".

[35] AUGUSTINUS, *praed. sanct*. 7, 12.

[36] AUGUSTINUS, *praed. sanct*. 7, 12.

logic of working; actually, it marks it profoundly. In a beautiful sermon given in Carthage around 417, referring to a symbolic reading of the three dimensions of the cross (width, length, and height-depth), Augustine affirms: the width of the cross is «caritas [...] quae sola bene operatur», while its length is the «perseverandi longanimitatem» and its height is having God in one's mind and loving Him. Therefore, you who seek the glory of the cross, have «bene operandi virtutem»[37].

In this sense, there is also a radical reconsideration of any dichotomy between active and contemplative life:

> «Duae virtutes propositae [...] animae humanae, una activa, altera contemplativa, illa qua itur, ista quo pervenitur, illa qua laboratur, ut cor mundetur ad videndum Deum; ista qua vacatur et videtur Deus [...] illa operatur, ista requiescit»[38].

Here (Augustine is writing around the year 399 or 400) the vision of the immutable truth is increasingly considered as a humanly extraordinary experience: «apud perpaucos per speculum in aenigmate et ex parte»[39]. Contemplation is always considered by far superior to action, but above all after 402, partly because of the controversy with the Manichean bishop Faustus, as also revealed by Rist[40], action is increasingly understood as the normal vocation of this earthly life, while contemplation is the object of hope and can only be attained in its fullness at the end of time, when we will be able to contemplate *maiora opera* («Et maiora his demonstrabit ei opera, ut vos miremini»[41]).

Of fundamental importance in this regard is a text from *Contra Faustum* that says that active service in justice is finalized toward contemplation, but the *opus iustitiae* constitutes for it a kind of necessary anticipatory condition, represented by Leah, Jacob's first wife («Lia interpretatur Laborans»[42]); thus a secret contemplative intentionality justifies and redeems the uncertain toil of working:

> «Actio ergo humanae mortalisque vitae, in qua vivimus ex fide, multa laboriosa opera

---

[37] AUGUSTINUS, *s.* 165, 4, 4.

[38] AUGUSTINUS, *cons. ev.* 1, 5, 8. The first three gospels would have the active life in the foreground, while John's gospel would emphasize the contemplative.

[39] AUGUSTINUS, *cons. ev.* 1, 5, 8.

[40] Cf. J.M. RIST, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 200.

[41] AUGUSTINUS, *Io. ev. tr.* 21, 5. The reference is to John 5:20.

[42] Augustine uses various symbolic figures to represent action and contemplation: the two wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel (cf. AUGUSTINUS, *C. Faust*. 22, 52; *cons. ev.* 5, 8); Peter and John (cf. AUGUSTINUS, *Io. ev. tr.* 21, 5); Martha and Mary (cf. above all AUGUSTINUS, *s.* 104, but also *s.* 169, 14, 17; *trin*. 1, 10, 20; *qu. ev.* 2, 20).

facientes, incerti quo exitu proveniant ad utilitatem eorum quibus consulere volu-
mus»[43].

Instead, Rachel, Jacob's other wife, represents the hope of the eternal con-
templation of God, «habens certam et delectabilem intellegentiam veritatis». On
this point, Augustine acknowledges a kind of axiomatic evidence of the prima-
cy of contemplation:

«Neque enim se quisquam convertit sub gratia remissionis peccatorum servire iusti-
tiae, nisi ut quiete vivat in verbo ex quo videtur principium, quod est Deus: ergo
propter Rachel, non propter Liam. Nam quis tandem amaverit in operibus iustitiae la-
borem actionum atque passionum? Quis eam vitam propter seipsam expetiverit?».

Man would like to attain perfect wisdom directly, without having to bear any
of the toil that must be embraced when one acts and suffers, but this is impossi-
ble in the current historical condition:

«Vellet enim homo, si fieri posset, sine ulla tolerantia laboris, quae in agendo patien-
doque amplectenda est, statim ad pulchrae atque perfectae sapientiae delicias per-
venire: sed hoc non potest in terra morientium. Hoc enim videtur significare, quod dic-
tum est ad Iacob: Non est moris in loco nostro, ut minor nubat prius quam maior. Quia
non absurde maior appellatur, quae tempore prior est. Prior est autem in recta homin-
is eruditione labor operandi quae iusta sunt, quam voluptas intellegendi quae vera
sunt»[44].

Seeing in the naive story of Leah and Rachel a scriptural confirmation, Au-
gustine thus validates *labor operandi* as the toil of the edification of the just, a
historically necessary condition for the fruition of the comprehension of truth.
By now it is evident that he rejects any interpretation of mysticism as evasive or
disengaged.
At this point, the distinction between active and contemplative goes beyond
that elaborated by Porphyry between the spheres of the intellect and the ap-
petites:

«Augustine moved from seeing the body merely as the instrument of the soul to see-
ing it also as the soul's beloved, the soul's object of serious responsibility, and to be re-
tained, even with its sexual differentiations, in the Resurrection. Similarly however,
just as the body is "in" the soul, so action can become "in" contemplation»[45].

---

[43] AUGUSTINUS, *C. Faust*. 22, 52.
[44] AUGUSTINUS, *C. Faust*. 22, 52.
[45] RIST, *Augustine* cit., p. 201.

In this sense, one can say that within the historical horizon, action must contain contemplation, just as within the horizon of eternity, contemplation can be realized as active contemplation of the "works of God". The more one abandons the Porphyrian *omne corpus fugiendum*, the more action and contemplation appear intimately correlated, as the condition for actuating a fulfilled Christian life. What matters, in the final analysis, is not so much that one acts or contemplates, but that the whole axis of the vital desire be ordered toward God. Any further distinction between "living" and "dead" works cannot help but move from this orientation, and from this perspective, one can re-read both the attentive calibration of the monastic life, and the ideal of Christian life for the layperson.

3.   Further development through the texts

At this point, we can move to a closer examination of three "minor" writings in which our theme receives significant attention.

3.1.   *De sermone Domini in monte*

The first reference is to a writing dated 394. Augustine, a priest for just three years, and not yet bishop, commenting on the fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel, dedicated to the famous Sermon on the Mount, engages in a catechesis encouraging a Christian life in full conformation to the Gospel. Even though in the foreground there are the steps of spiritual ascent (defined by a seven fold framework, already widely used, starting with the *De quantitate animae*, on the basis of Isaiah 11:2-3), there begins to emerge an ethics of social justice and an idea of the Christian life as a struggle. First of all, three different forms of sin are identified («in corde, in facto, in consuetudine»), deemed worthy of three different deaths: at home, outside the door of one's house «cum in factum procedit adsensio», and in the grave[46].

Commentating thus on the passage of Mt. 5:29-30 («If your right eye is your trouble, gouge it out and throw it away! [...] And if your right hand is your trouble, cut it off and throw it away»), Augustine reveals a double difference: between the eye and the hand, and between the left (understood as turned toward the earthly dimension) and the right sides (understood as turned toward the divine dimension). Consequently, there is a dual possibility for disorder and sin, pertaining not only to the eye and the hand, but also to the left side and the right. Just as there is not just the left eye, but also the right, which shows the path «in

---

[46] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *s. dom. m.* 1, 12, 35.

rebus terrenis ad necessitatem corporis pertinentibus», and both can be of scandal, so in the same way both hands of man are necessary:

> «et dextera manus accipitur dilectus adiutor et minister in divinis operibus – nam quemadmodum in oculo contemplatio, sic in manu actio recte intellegitur – ut sinistra manus intellegatur in operibus quae huic vitae et corpori sunt necessaria»[47].

Therefore the moral difference is not primarily between eyes and hands, nor even between the earthly life and the heavenly one, but between a life in which the active moment and the contemplative one respect the *ordo creationis* and a life that on the contrary loses its way, overturning every ordered hierarchy between changeable and unchangeable[48]. In the background there is always the conviction of the indispensable complementarity between the two dimensions in the present historical condition:

> «Cum enim beata vita actione et cognitione compleatur, actio facultatem virium, contemplatio manifestationem rerum desiderat. Horum ergo primum petendum, secundum quaerendum est, ut illud detur, hoc inveniatur. Sed cognitio in hac vita viae prius quam ipsius possessionis est. Sed cum quisque veram viam invenerit, perveniet ad ipsam possessionem, quae tamen pulsanti aperietur»[49].

The final criterion for all historic working, however, must always be metahistorical:

> «Ergo cum aliquid boni operamur, non temporalia, sed aeterna cogitemus! Tunc erit illud bonum et perfectum opus»[50].

Thus the primary thing remains the upright intention:

> «In hac opera qua navem quaero non navem quaero sed patriam [...] In hac opera qua hominibus placeo non hominibus sed Deo placeo, quia non hoc appeto, sed ad id refero ut me imitentur quos salvos fieri volo»[51].

---

[47] AUGUSTINUS, *s. dom. m*. 1, 13, 38.

[48] Augustine will return to this point in an important passage of the XIX book of *De civitate Dei*, in which he comes to affirm, in relation to the numerous philosophical schools counted by Varro: «Ex tribus vero illis vitae generibus, otioso, actuoso et ex utroque composito, quamvis salva fide quisque possit in quolibet eorum vitam lucere et ad sempiterna praemia pervenire, interest tamen quid amore teneat veritatis, quid officio caritatis impendat» (AUGUSTINUS, *civ.* 19, 19). The only limit is set by a dynamic equilibrium between truth and charity: nobody should be so free as not to think of the benefit of his neighbor, and none so active as not to seek the contemplation of God.

[49] AUGUSTINUS, *s. dom. m.* 2, 21, 71.

[50] AUGUSTINUS, *s. dom. m.* 2, 17, 56.

[51] AUGUSTINUS, *s. dom. m.* 2, 1, 3. Again: «ne humanam laudem pro nostrorum operum mercede quaeramus» (*De serm. Dom.* 2, 1, 4).

Action, in fact, is illuminated by the *animus bonus* with which one acts[52]. Human approval thus must not be the condition for acting, but only one of its consequences: «Laus enim humana non appeti a recte facente, sed sequi debet recte facientem»[53]. Therefore, one must always seek in the subject who acts the greatest coherence possible between *animus* and *opus*. In this sense it is impossible that someone who is *malus bene faciat*: if he produces good fruit, he is no longer bad. In the same way, it doesn't snow hot; if it begins to heat up, it would be water, not snow[54].

Instead, the interpreting community must acknowledge the unavoidable opacity of the work, one that prohibits any peremptory ethical judgment. For that matter, there are too many «facta media, quae ignoramus quo animo fiant, quae et bono et malo fieri possunt»*;* thus, we cannot judge, much less condemn: «De manifestis ergo iudicemus; de occultis vero Deo iudicium relinquamus»[55]. Consequently, Augustine admonishes, we must not criticize actions whose intentions we do not know, nor those manifestly negative, as if we doubted their reformation[56]. God is the only one for whom the works of man are not hidden, be they good or bad ones. One must not be swayed by those claiming to possess the name of Christ, without works. As the Scriptures say, (1 Cor. 6:9), the Lord truly knows (in the sense of acknowledging) only those who work with equity: «Non ergo cognoscit nisi eum qui operatur aequitatem»[57].

3.2. *De opere monachorum*

Augustine composed this work around 400-401 (as we have said, a decisive period in the reconsideration of the question), in order to settle a controversy about the work of monks, which arose precisely from a distorted interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. He addresses Aurelius and the monks of Carthage, dealing with the problem of manual labor, perhaps for the first time directly, and thus influencing the later monastic projects of Saint Benedict and Saint Isidore. In the background is classical culture's suspicion (reinforced by Manichaeism[58]) of work, and more in general of the religious man's excessive familiarity with the material horizon of life, which instead Augustine intends to rehabilitate in the light

[52] Cf. Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 13, 46.

[53] Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 2, 5.

[54] Cf. Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 24, 79.

[55] Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 18, 60.

[56] Cf. Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 18, 61.

[57] Augustinus, *s. dom. m.* 2, 25, 84.

[58] Cf. Augustinus, *C. Faustum* 5, 1-6.

of the Scriptures and a detailed exegesis of Saint Paul[59]. At the same time, the Bishop of Hippo demonstrates alertness in extending his pastoral care to the concrete socio-economic context: the component of the monks from the high classes (big landowners, senators, imperial dignitaries) was extremely small, while most came from a modest social background, and were accustomed to manual labor. Augustine addresses a very important message to them: «Ils n'avaient aucune raison de s'y soustraire et d'y trouver un obstacle à la méditation et à l'oraison»[60].

The rehabilitation of manual labor is explicit and fervent, supported by an unequivocal terminology (*Manibus laborare, corporaliter operari, manibus operari*). Manual labor not only is necessary for living, but also is the place and occasion for moral perfection. The monks who think otherwise are in error and must be helped to find the truth again. Unapplicable here is the comparison with the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field, who in the gospel are never held up as an example of an operatively disengaged aesthetic life. Once again here, we have a separation between the nature of the working activity and the moral judgment that can be expressed on it, a judgment that can never be based, through some kind of unacceptable evaluative automatism, on the manual nature of the work. The distance from the Manichean gnosis and the severe separation between the "Elect" members of the sect and the faithful "Hearers", among whom Augustine himself had once been numbered, could not be more drastic.

Not only: he goes so far as to establish an interesting and very current difference between «corpore laborare animo libero», as in artisans who are neither dishonest nor greedy, and the activity typical of merchants, contractors, or financial intermediaries, who do not engage in manual labor per se («ipsum animum occupare curis colligendae sine corporis labore pecuniae»), and yet can be interiorly dominated by «sollicitudo habendi»[61]. In this case, a (relative) dematerialization of the work does not automatically raise it on the scale of moral excellence. Evil is not measured by the distance from the spiritual order, but by the disorder of the passions, which become more dangerous when they are interiorly rooted and feed the infernal spiral of the *libido dominandi*.

3.3. *De fide et operibus*

The central issue addressed in *De fide et operibus*, which Augustine wrote in 413, together with *De spiritu et lettera* and with the beginning of *De civitate Dei*, at the

---

[59] «Corporale opus operabatur Apostolus» (AUGUSTINUS, *op. mon.* 13, 14). «In ipso opere corporali id quod bonum est operabatur Apostolus» (AUGUSTINUS, *op. mon.* 13, 14).

[60] S. LANCEL, *Saint Augustin*, Fayard, Paris 1999, p. 325.

[61] AUGUSTINUS, *op. mon.* 15, 16.

time of the Donatist schism, is the admission of catechumens to baptism. Three questions follow: the mixture of the good and the bad in the Church; the difference between baptism candidates and the baptized (is it perhaps enough to announce the truths of the faith to the former, while expecting upright behavior only of the latter?); the insufficiency of *sola fides* (is it enough for the bad to believe in Christ to be saved?).

In articulating his responses, the Author enunciates the foundational thesis: «fides sine operibus mortua est»[62]. Conscious of Paul's warning («If I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing»: 1 Cor. 13:2) and that of James' («What good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it?»: James 2:14), Augustine admonishes: works of mercy are of no use without love[63] and in the final analysis, are of value only for their theocentric orientation: «Quidquid enim homo veluti recte fecerit, nisi ad pietatem quae ad Deum est, referatur, rectum dici non oportet»[64]. In short, what counts is the «fides quae operatur per dilectionem»[65].

Augustine thus takes up the challenge of the "merciful" who proclaimed the value of *sola fides*; he answers them saying that it is mistaken to think of instructing baptism candidates on the faith (first commandment) and only the baptized on behavior (second commandment). The primacy of faith does not in the least imply a diachronic articulation in catechesis between faith and works, which, on the contrary, ought to always be together («utraque enim mutuo connexa sunt»[66]). Announcing Christ is believing and observing; those who believe in God must do what God commands, and those who do so, believe in God [67].

As emphasized by the words of Peter, reported in the Acts of the Apostles (2:38-41), only one thing counts:

> «In his verbis erat mortuorum operum condemnatio, quae nequiter agunt huius saeculi dilectores, et commendatio vitae bonae, quam teneant atque sectentur qui se ab hoc pravo saeculo eripiunt»[68].

To this end, one must separate from dead works, «quae oportet mortificari, ut vivamus»[69].

---

[62] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 15, 25. The reference is to James 2:20.

[63] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 15, 25.

[64] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 7, 11.

[65] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 14, 21; 16, 27. The reference is to Gal 5:6.

[66] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 13, 20.

[67] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 14,21.

[68] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 8, 13.

[69] AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 11, 17.

Thus, when Paul affirms that man is justified by faith without the works of the law (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), he does not mean that one can do without the works of justice[70]. The law is fulfilled not for fear of punishment, but for love of justice[71]. In any case, besides Paul, who refers above all to the works that precede faith, focusing his effort on the non-believer, Augustine also draws from Peter and James, who instead refer to the works that follow faith, writing above all for the believer.

Consequently, it is necessary to correctly understand the different forms of *sequela Christi* indicated by the Scriptures. When, for example, there is a distinction between those who build on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones, and those who do so with wood, hay or straw (1 Cor. 3:11-12)[72], the reference is not in the first case to the faithful who enrich their faith with good works and in the second case to those who act badly. Assuming such an interpretation, one would end up holding all admissible for baptism. In reality, building on the foundation of Christ is always loving concretely, thus operatively; doing so with gold means loving perfectly, doing it with base and perishable materials means instead loving imperfectly, that is, with fleshly attachment[73]. What counts is believing in God with upright faith, in order to obtain from Him help in living well, and in the case of sin, in such a way as to merit His indulgence[74].

4. The work, in terms of ethics and ontology

At this point, from the *excursus* just sketched out, one can draw a few rapid conclusions.

First of all, one can affirm the insuperable ambivalence of every form of human working, in a sense that can be called typically Augustinian: work is an irreducible *medium*, to be excluded from all attempts at naturalistic reduction, but also from de-legitimization in the name of a poorly understood spiritualistic primacy. In fact, it cannot be reduced to an event that enjoys absolute practical autonomy and, for this reason, is not capable of self-attributing its meaning; the best of Platonic tradition, to which Augustine consciously belongs, blocked him from going in this direction. This is the context in which one should interpret the

---

[70] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 14, 21.

[71] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 21, 39.

[72] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 1, 1; 15, 24-25.

[73] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 16, 27.

[74] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *f. et op.* 22, 41.

invitations to always seek a broader horizon of comprehension, for situating a correct hermeneutics of the work; for this reason Augustine does not hesitate to admonish: «In operibus non discernimus»[75].

On the other hand, however, man's work cannot be likened to an impoverished form of spiritual life either, as if one were dealing with an irrelevant *simulacrum* of reality, whose *raison d'être* only derives from the possibility of mirroring in a roughly deformed and historically insignificant way a timeless heaven of principles; the entire dogmatic framework of the Christian faith, beginning with the theology of creation, held him back from pushing too far along this road, toward which a certain Platonism of his could easily have inclined him.

Augustine's dialectic of *signum* and *res* derives precisely from this creationistic horizon, and shapes his inquiry with the unmistakable bent toward an ontological semantics by which the entire scale of being is arranged according to an ordered hierarchy of *uti* and *frui*. The constitution of a true "semantic ontology" comes from the possibility for acknowledging that «les choses à user sont transitives comme les signes» while «les choses don't on jouit, intransitives», as Todorov has said of Augustine[76]. Consequently, «la sémiotique ne mérite le droit à l'existence que si, dans le geste meme qui l'inaugure, s'articulent déjà sémantique et symbolique»[77].

In this regard, it is well to remember that for Augustine, alongside the *res* that are the source of fruition and, for this reason, of happiness, there are other *res* that represent an intermediate support in the walk toward *beatitudo*, and others still open to fruition and use. On this basis, the «res qua fruendum» is substantially identified with the divine Trinity itself[78], the «res quibus utendum» with the «dispensatio temporalis»[79], that is, the entire temporal order, redeemed by the incarnate Wisdom in the salvific economy, and finally, the «res quae fruuntur et utuntur» with human creatures, located in an intermediate position, inasmuch as they can gain access to the *frui* and the *uti* and at the same time can overturn the ordered intentionality of the hierarchical framework.

And since *opus* is also, in its way, a «res ad significandum aliquid»[80], in this case there is a circularity between *signum* and *res* that is ontological, before hermeneutical: it is possible to reach that which the sign indicates, interpreting its intentional importance, because it is possible, at the same time, to recognize

[75] AUGUSTINUS, *ep. Io. tr.* 8, 9.

[76] T. TODOROV, *Théories du symbole*, Seuil, Paris 1977, p. 39.

[77] TODOROV, *Théories du symbole* cit., p. 58.

[78] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *doctr. chr.* 1, 5, 5-10,10.

[79] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *doctr. chr.* 1, 11, 11-22, 20.

[80] On the definition of the sign in these terms, cf. AUGUSTINUS, *doctr. chr*. 1, 2, 2.

an intrinsically sensate *ordo rerum*. In other words, there is an originary belonging of *res* and *signum* that is also manifested through operative mediation: the *signum* can signify in the measure to which the *res* can be a signifier.

The ontological horizon of the work is also marked by this dual reference, both foundational and teleological: *a parte ante* the human work refers to an author responsible for it, *a parte post* it alludes to an ultimate goal in the light of which it must be judged. The linguistic mediation to which the Author entrusts himself authorizes us to affirm that it "speaks" the language of the author, and testifies to its deepest intentionality, even though in forms that can always be perfected and are never exhaustive. Herein lies the power of the word that confers testimonial value on works, which, in turn, are another way to continue speaking, as in the case of the Christian martyrs: «Hodie asserunt, hodie praedicant: tacet lingua, sonant facta»[81]. The fact that every human work, unlike the *opus creationis*, is both fragile and precious, does not lessen its value, but rather, radicalizes and in many aspects, dramatizes it; as Kierkegaard well understood, here the "Lessing problem" is in play: in time, human working decides in some way for eternity.

At the same time, Augustine the believer, who professes with the force of the faith the resurrection of bodies in the new heavens and new earth, even allows a glimpse of the possibility of a *resurrectio operis*, a *bonum et perfectum opus*, set within a meta-temporal horizon, run through with an unthinkable prominence of concreteness; this regenerated ontological state will not only engage the comunional fruition of the *civitatis Dei coelestis*, but even its antagonistic counterpart, represented by the hatred in its pure state of the damned, who for eternity cannot escape their own solitude.

Therefore, one must not confuse the ontological horizon with the ethical order, as instead happened in Manichean gnosis, which ended up legitimizing an unacceptable dualistic splitting. The work has an ontological positivity that still is not equivalent to its moral goodness, but leaves it in the ambivalent dimension of a *medium bonum*, as *voluntas* was defined in *De libero arbitrio*[82], that in-

---

[81] AUGUSTINUS, *s.* 286, 4, 3. «Le martyre en effet n'est pas d'un autre ordre que la parole; il est la parole tenue, soutenue, jusqu'au bout» (CHRÉTIEN, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole* cit., p. 146). According to Chrétien, in the background there is always the Christological paradigm: in Christ, the judge and witness are one (cf. AUGUSTINUS, *Io. ev. tr.* 36, 11). «Mais c'est seulement comme témoin – Chrétien comments – qu'il sera le juge, un témoin qui n'est pas un spectatuer indifférent, car il vient donner son témoignage, en se donnant lui-même corps et âme, jusque sur le Golgotha, ce témoin qui est le même que le Sauveur» (CHRÉTIEN, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole* cit., p. 148).

[82] Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *lib. arb.* 2, 19, 52. This definition came from the context of a classification founded on the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of *tria genera bonorum* (cf. ARIST., *Eth. Nic.* 1, 8, 1098 b 12-15), between *magna bona* (the *virtutes*), *minima bona* (the *species corporum*) and *media bona* (the *potentiae animi*). Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *lib. arb.* 2, 19, 50.

terpellates the responsibility of the will; this always in the context of the insu-
perable primacy of the faith («in homine ipso nisi praecedat fides, vita bona se-
qui non poterit»[83]), that historically leaves the games open until the very end,
authorizing even the possibility of practically redeeming dead works: «fructuosa
est poenitentia, quae agitur de mortuis operibus»[84].

Therefore, there is an ethical lien on human working that the Trinitarian me-
diation helps to conceive in terms of a reflexive interiority[85], structurally consti-
tuted by a finite process of historical incarnation; the line between good and evil
is entrusted to the correct intentional direction of the *ordo amoris* and the mea-
sure of moral life: «errant autem homines, non servantes modum»[86]. The equi-
librium of the measure, however, is not conquered by taking refuge in a neutral-
ized spiritual space or, like the stoics, locking oneself into a pacified "fortress of
the soul", extraneous to both acting and suffering, but instead, by living deeply
to the core the agonal logic of the incarnation, in a dynamic cycle of *intus* and of
foris. For this reason, Augustine distinguishes: «Virtus ad operationem, sapien-
tia vero ad disciplinam». And asking himself what the *operatio* proper to the
virtues is, he answers:

> «Sobrietas mihi ad ipsam cognitionem veri videtur pertinere, id est ad disciplinam,
> iustitia vero et virtus ad actionem atque operationem»[87].

Entrusting to the virtuous practice of justice the entire dominion of the opera-
tive execution and correlating it with the *sobrietas* held by *sapientia*, Augustine
sets into cycle a kind of ontological dynamic, in which the *esse* announces itself
to be essentially like *esse ad*. What counts is being able to arrive at the origin of
this intentional dynamism and recognize the originary theological motivation:
just as the *medium* of love is what makes possible the interior genesis of the *ver-
bum*, so the *dilectio* is the testimonial form proper to a faith that cannot exist with-
out works. In this sense, the *interior* dimension not only functions as separation
and detachment from that which is *exterior*, naturalistically understood, but al-
so as an act generating a new *exterior* dimension, understood as expression of a
moral life, through which the creature prolongs the *opus creationis*, restoring to

[83] Augustinus, *f. et op.* 7, 11.

[84] Augustinus, *f. et op.* 8, 12.

[85] Augustine's debt, on this point, to the mediation of the Scriptures, alongside the reading of the *li-
bri Platonicorum*, is underlined by I. Bochet, in *«Le firmament de l'Écriture». L'herméneutique augus-
tinienne*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2004, pp. 316-327.

[86] Augustinus, *f. et op.* 4, 5. This equilibrium is invoked by Augustine also for the sinners in the
Church: «nec patientiae nomine torpescamus, nec obtentu diligentiae saeviamus» (Augustinus, *f. et op.*
5, 7).

[87] Augustinus, *mor.* 1, 16, 27.

the world more than it receives. A road that subsequent thought perhaps failed to travel fully, thus missing the heuristic value that the intuition of Augustine, even with its many limitations, offered.