

## PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST: PSALM 118 IN AMBROSE AND AUGUSTINE

Augustine and Ambrose both wrote sermons on *Psalm* 118 (119) at the zenith of their episcopal careers and in the last decade of their lives. I want to put these two exegetical works in dialogue with each other by focusing on a common theological theme that, as yet, has not received consideration. This is the dominant motif of *participation* that is operative in both commentaries. I will argue that both Ambrose and Augustine present a Christological account of participation which functions as the basis of their respective ecclesiologies. Within this overarching Christological framework, we will see that in Ambrose's exegesis of *Psalm* 118 (119) participation finds its starting point in the *imago Dei*, whereas Augustine's *Enarratio in psalmum cxviii* anchors participation in the grace Christ offers through the incarnation.

*Ambrose's Expositio psalmi cxviii.*

Only a scant amount of secondary literature exists on Ambrose's exposition on *Psalm* 118.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, this small segment of his corpus is significant; by way of general overview it is propitious to note that Ambrose's exposition contains four dominant theological motifs: first, there is a sustained emphasis on the unity of Christ the

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<sup>1</sup> Propitious literature includes A. Fitzgerald, *Ambrose, Paul and Expositio Psalmi CXVIII*, in *Augustiniana* 54 (2004), 129-46; P. F. Moretti, *Non harundo sed calamus: aspetti letterari della Explanatio psalmorum XII di Ambrogio*, Milano 2000 (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università degli studi di Milano. Sezione di filologia classica 192). This work contains a very fruitful discussion of the oral culture in which Ambrose delivered his homilies. Luigi Franco Pizzolato has made a great contribution to the study of Ambrose's *Expositio psalmi cxviii* by his translation and extensive notation. Cf. *Sant'Ambrogio, Commento al salmo CXVIII: Expositio psalmi CXVIII*, ed. L. F. Pizzolato, Milano 1987 (Sancti Ambrosii episcopi mediolanensis opera 9-10); L. F. Pizzolato, *La dottrina esegetica di sant'Ambrogio*, in *Studia Patristica Mediolanensia* 9 (1978), 117-29.

Word with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is a theological response to the pervasive Arian Christology that embroiled Ambrose during his entire episcopate. The unity of the Godhead is preserved in Ambrose's theology by the unity of operations. Second, a rich ecclesiology is expressed in the commentary, often built around a Marian typology with recourse to the Song of Songs. Third, the commentary is evidence of the neo-Platonic milieu current in Milan at the time. In this regard, Ambrose's account of the ascent of the soul displays many Platonic resonances. Lastly, like Augustine's commentary on *Psalm* 118, Ambrose's exposition is profoundly informed by the theology of the Apostle Paul.

Preceding our investigation into Ambrose's use of *participatio* in *Psalm* 118 it is fruitful to consider his use of the term more broadly in his corpus. To that end we will briefly limn certain theologically significant uses of the term. Then we will analyze Ambrose's use of *participatio* in *Psalm* 118 in which the term is used in reference to the *imago Dei*. We will discover that *imago* is used to bespeak both created human existence and the Eternal Word. Indeed, it is through participation in the Image that human beings are constituted in the *imago Dei*. Lastly, Ambrose develops a nuanced participatory ecclesiology regarding participation in Christ based on *Mt.* 25 anticipating the *totus Christus* ecclesiology of Augustine.

In Ambrose's *Expositio psalmi cxviii* there are 17 occurrences of a form of the word *participatio*. Considering that in his work as a whole *participatio* and its cognates appear only 70 times, the exegesis on *Psalm* 118 demonstrates a sustained interaction with this theological concept. In its basic usage *participatio* connotes for Ambrose an intimate union or sharing in something or someone. Ambrose's use of *participatio* functions both actively and passively. Initially in his exposition on *Psalm* 118 it is a "state": in creation the human person is endowed with the image of God. This passive sense of *participatio* is taken up by the human person to receive an active character: the human person is called to live according to the image in which he is created. We will see that this is similarly expressed in Ambrose's ecclesiology. The incarnation is the means through which human beings passively participate in Christ's body – the Church. The human person then comes to actively participate in this body when he loves Christ in his vulnerable members, maintains Ambrose, appealing to *Mt.* 25.

Representative of Ambrose's Pauline and Platonic usage of *participatio* is a comment in *De paradiso* 9, 44 in which Ambrose discusses participating in Christ's death by dying to self in this life in order to participate in Christ in the life to come: *Ergo absit a nobis, ut participes mortis uiuamus, sed contra participes uitae moriamur; sanctus enim nec uitae istius se uult esse participem*. A similar theological trope regarding participation in Christ's death and life is presented in *De Tobia* 20, 74 and in *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* 2. Epigrammatically in *De fide libri* Ambrose writes, *In Christo enim deo caro, in carne autem humani natura generis omnium hominum particeps honoratur*.<sup>2</sup> A variation on the same theme is Ambrose enjoining the faithful to participate in the servitude of Christ that they might participate in his reign in *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* 8.

*Participatio* is employed by Ambrose to express various ways of "sharing in" something or someone: do not participate in wickedness, Ambrose urges his flock;<sup>3</sup> rather participate in Christ in whom God is well pleased.<sup>4</sup> At the death of his brother Satyrus, Ambrose laments the loss of his "sharer (*particeps*) in my cares."<sup>5</sup> In the anti-Arian writings Ambrose describes the unity of Father and Son by using the word *participatio*.<sup>6</sup> And, commenting on Mary's *Magnificat*, Ambrose discusses *participatio* in conjunction with theology of the image of God similar to the way he will deploy the term in his exposition on *Psalms* 118.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ambr., *fid.* 5, 14. A longer exposition of this pithy phrase is found earlier in the work: "Let us now review a whole passage in order. 'Seeing, then, that the sons have parts of flesh and blood (*Ergo quia filii participes sunt sanguinis et carnis*), He too likewise was made to have part [*particeps*] in the same, to the end that by death He might overthrow him who had the power of death' [*Hbr.* 2, 14]. Who, then, is He Who would have us to be partakers (*participes*) in His own flesh and blood? Surely the Son of God. How, save by means of the flesh, was He made partaker [*particeps*] with us, or by what, save by bodily death, broke He the chains of death?" Ambr., *fid.* 3, 11 (ed. H. Romestin [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 10]).

<sup>3</sup> Ambr., *patr.* 2, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 43, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ambr., *exc. Sat.* 1, 20, similarly at 1, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 36, 78 and in *Luc.* 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Magnificatur enim dominus, sicut et alibi legisti: magnificate dominum me cum non quo domino aliquid humana uoce possit adiungi, sed quia magnificatur in*

A number of instances of *participatio* occur in several critical passage of Ambrose's *De spiritu sancto*.<sup>8</sup> Here he constructs an argument for the equality of the Spirit to the other divine persons by focusing on the Spirit's role in the Gospels and in the rite of baptism. The use of *participatio* in relation to the Spirit in these texts demonstrates that for Ambrose participation in the Holy Spirit is not a *de facto* reality simply on account of the Spirit's "presence," but can be "shared in" only in as much as one is able. Further, Ambrose distinguishes between the Spirit's presence within the Godhead where he imparts and is participated in, and his presence in creation where it is acquired and received.

Now that we have a "lay of the land" with respect to Ambrose's use of *participatio*, the use of the term in his exposition of *Psalm* 118 takes on special significance. *Participatio* here proceeds with a consideration of all of created existence. Everything has creaturely existence by way of participation in God and in his omnipresent Word. Commenting on *Col.* 1, 15-16 ("He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for by him all things were created both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been

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*nobis: imago enim dei christus est et ideo si quid iustum religiosum que fecerit anima illam imaginem dei, ad cuius est similitudinem creata, magnificat et ideo, dum magnificat eam, magnitudinis eius quadam participatione sublimior fit, ut illam imaginem splendido bonorum colore factorum et quadam aemulatione uirtutis in se uideatur exprimere* (Ambr., in *Luc.* 2).

<sup>8</sup> "For what is the Spirit but full of goodness? Who though because of His nature He cannot be attained to, yet because of His goodness can be received by us, filling all things by His power, but only partaken (*participetur*) of by the just, simple in substance, rich in virtues, present to each, dividing of His own to everyone, and Himself whole everywhere." Ambr., *spir.* 1, 5, 72 (ed. H. Romestin [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 10]). "Since, then, the whole invisible creation (whose substance some rightly believe to be reasonable and incorporeal), with the exception of the Trinity, does not impart but acquires the grace of the Spirit, and does not share in it but receives it (*non impertiat spiritalem gratiam, sed adquirat, nec participet, sed adsumat*), the whole commonalty of creation is to be separated from association with the Holy Spirit." Ambr., *spir.* 1, 5, 72. "[W]e receive so much as the advancing of our mind acquires, for the fullness of the grace of the Spirit is indivisible, but is shared in (*participatur*) by us according to the capacity of our own nature." Ambr., *spir.* 1, 8, 93.

created through him and for him.”)<sup>9</sup> Ambrose explains that the Word has infused himself in all created existence: “In every single thing created in him you will see one Word.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we too, insists Ambrose, are partakers of him (*cuius pro captu nostro participes sumus*).<sup>11</sup> However, human participation in the Word takes on a unique perspective in comparison to the rest of the created order: the human person is created in the *imago Dei*.

But what does Ambrose mean when he speaks of the *imago Dei*? A significant component of the commentary is devoted to considering precisely this question.<sup>12</sup> Interpreting verse 73 (“Your hands have made me and formed me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments”).<sup>13</sup> Ambrose notes the splendor of created existence, particularly human beings. Despite being creatures of clay, “clothed in flesh” and “woven of bones and nerves,” God’s handiwork is marvelously displayed.<sup>14</sup> Ambrose remarks on the beauty of the person; his tall dignified stance, august demeanor, and beautiful hair.<sup>15</sup> Particularly noble and distinctive is the human person’s ability to stand upright and “freely look up to the heavens.”<sup>16</sup> Despite all this, the *imago Dei* does not reside in the human person’s corporeal existence: “Man, however, is lovelier in that which is not seen than in the body that is seen.”<sup>17</sup> He is the only creature aware of his created dignity and splendor, and is thereby “an eloquent witness of his maker.”<sup>18</sup> Further, the human person bears eternity within him, something on which the corrosive vicissitudes of history

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<sup>9</sup> New American Standard Bible, La Habra 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 3, 20 (ed. Í. N. Riain, Dublin 1998). The Latin text I will use is the CSEL 62 (ed. M. Petschenig, Vindobonae 1913).

<sup>11</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 3, 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Hexaemeron* contains further discussion by Ambrose on the *imago Dei*.

<sup>13</sup> I am following Íde Ní Riain’s translation of Ambrose’s use of the Septuagint.

<sup>14</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 6. Cf. in *psalm 118* 5,32: “So lift up your mind and make use of your natural intelligence. You are made in the likeness of God. You must seek the things that are above, rather than things that are below, bending your neck to take upon it the weight of this world.”

<sup>17</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 6.

and ravages of time have no effect. Ambrose writes, "In this terrestrial lodging he is clothed with heavenly habitation; he who simultaneously is visible on earth is also joined to God."<sup>19</sup> It is as creatures in the image of God that from the beginning human beings are made unique participants of God.

Thus, the phrasing of the *Psalm*, "Your hands have made me and formed me," recalls for Ambrose the creation narrative in which God decreed, "Let us make man to our image and likeness" (*Gen.* 1, 26).<sup>20</sup> The creation account, for Ambrose, confers a special dignity on the human person; he is more than dust and matter, for he bears within himself an eternal and immaterial soul: "Know yourself, O soul; know that you are not of earth and clay: God has breathed on you and made you a living soul."<sup>21</sup> Ambrose is adamant that it is the soul, not the body, which partakes of the *imago Dei*. In his sermon this insistence is coupled with a moral injunction: to raise the mind to things above; it is beyond the dignity of the human soul created in the image of God to be trapped in "worldly and mundane things."<sup>22</sup> Ambrose exhorts the faithful in Milan:

Learn, O man, in what you are great, in what you are precious. Earth shows you to be vile, but virtue makes you glorious. Faith makes you rare, the likeness you bear makes you precious (*imago pretiosum*). For what is so precious as an image of God? (*an quicquam tam pretiosum quam imago est dei?*). This likeness to him should fill you with faith. A sort of picture of your maker should shine out from your heart, so that if anyone were to question your soul they would not fail to find the creator.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 10. Hence, Ambrose tells his congregation to live according to the image within them: "The Lord made your soul in his own image and likeness. He made it rational, just and chaste. You are in God's image if you are so just as to be the very image of justice; and if you are so chaste as to be a shining reflection of God's immaculate purity" (Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 23).

<sup>23</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 10. Similarly Ambrose writes: "To her the Spouse replies: 'Place me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm' [*Cl.* 8, 6] because you have kept both the new and the old for me. You are my seal; in my image and likeness. Let the image of justice, wisdom and

We see that for Ambrose the beauty of the human body is secondary to the eternal soul in which his true glory resides, bearing an image of God.

The moral injunction Ambrose enjoins on his listeners contains an interesting corollary: it appears that, at least in some sense, this image can be lost on account of sin. In sinning the human person becomes less than his nature; Scripture describes him as an animal: "For Scripture calls man those whom God made in his own image and likeness. When, however, he sins it usually calls him not man but serpent, horse neighing after the mares, little fox, or mule."<sup>24</sup> Thus, it almost seems that the *imago Dei* is for Ambrose a treasured gift that can be lost: "Take care not to lose the great gift God has given you, the gift of being made in his own image."<sup>25</sup> In sinning human beings debase themselves; they become less than what they were created to be, so that they no longer seem to bear the *imago Dei*. Ambrose writes, "Having shed the beauty of the heavenly image we lose also the name of man, for we lose the grace of man (*gratiam hominis non tenemus*)."<sup>26</sup> Ambrose is ambiguous whether human beings can actually lose the *imago Dei* or whether this is a rhetorical flourish

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power shine in you. And because the image of God is in your heart, may it also be in your works; let the portrait of the Gospel be in your deeds, so that you keep my precepts in all your ways" (Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 22, 34).

<sup>24</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 11. *Vide ne quod deus tribuit amittas magnum illud munus, quod es ad imaginem dei*. The distinction between "image" and "likeness" so prevalent in the Eastern fathers is remarkably absent in this discussion. Here, as elsewhere, Ambrose uses the terms "image" and "likeness" interchangeably. Dudden similarly notes, "It may be observed that Ambrose does not distinguish between 'the image' and 'the likeness' of God, but uses the terms indifferently" (F. H. Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, vol. 2, Oxford 1935, 612, note 3).

<sup>26</sup> Ambr., in *psalm. 118* 10, 11. Unlike some Fathers, Ambrose has a very stark understanding of the Fall. Dudden explains that for Ambrose the Fall had profound effects on the human person: "He ceased to be 'a heavenly being' and became 'a being of earth'; he 'laid aside the image of the heavenly and took the image of the earthly.'" When he lost the image and likeness of God, the human person "ceased to be what he had been." "The loss of the image of God involved the loss of original righteousness." "He became irrational, carnal, animal" (F. H. Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, vol. 2, 615-16).

to his homily. He certainly presents a unique and striking anthropological nuance to his account of participation: the human person not only has the *imago Dei* and not only is *capax Dei*, but this also inscribes a supernatural end already in his created nature – to turn away from this supernatural end one becomes less than human. The human volatility underscores the participated nature of the *imago Dei*, through which Ambrose is intent to safeguard the genuine dynamism of the divine-human relationship.

We are created with greater dignity than the angels, insists Ambrose: “Angels were made to minister, man was made to his likeness”.<sup>27</sup> Act like angels then, urges Ambrose, for we have something even greater than angels: God came to dwell with us and thereby made us participants of his glory. The bishop writes, “For our sake he took flesh. Rather, he received us in that flesh which established the Son of Man upon God’s throne.... I read that not angels but men are buried with Christ and rise again with Christ. Consequently the Apostle says, ‘He brought us to life with Christ – it is through grace, you have been saved – and at the same time he raised us up to sit with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus (*Eph.* 2, 5-6).”<sup>28</sup> Ambrose here introduces the incarnation as a corollary to the doctrine of creation in the *imago Dei*. Human beings are raised to participate with Christ in glory because of his condescension in participating in humanity.

Commensurate with and following from Ambrose’s discussion of the *imago Dei* is an exposition on the nature of Christ. He is most properly *the* image of God, whereas the human person is made *to* Christ’s image: “The Image comes to him who is made in the image. The Image seeks him who is made in his likeness to put his mark on him again.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, for Ambrose, human beings have the *imago Dei* by participation in the eternal image. Following the Apostle Paul he, therefore, enjoins the faithful to “put on the new man, renewed in

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<sup>27</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 16. Ambrose’s insistence that human beings are made according to the image of Christ (*ad imaginem dei*) seems to imply some element of dynamic maturation into, and growth towards, the image of God in his anthropology.



the image of his creator (*Col.* 3, 9-11).<sup>30</sup> Recreation follows the pattern of creation as Ambrose laconically expresses: "The Lord Jesus, who first made man in his image, is also the author of our body, which he shaped out of clay. He wanted to keep what he had made and to save what he had molded."<sup>31</sup> Christ, the image of God, refashions human beings in himself, explains Ambrose, so that they once again reflect their prototype.<sup>32</sup>

Ambrose's discussion of restored human beings' participation in the *imago Dei* develops into an ecclesiology of the body of Christ.

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<sup>30</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 17. Ambrose's use of the Apostle Paul in the *Expositio psalmi cxviii* has been carefully studied by Allan Fitzgerald, who notes that Paul is the theological bridge that holds together the Old Testament and the life of Christ: "Just as the organization of the liturgy of the Word passed from prophet to apostle to Christ, so does the role of the apostle Paul hold together – as glue – Ambrose's efforts to unite the human experience he finds in David's words with the daily ideals he proposes from the life of Christ. Paul does appear to have a specific role in facilitating the passage from shadow to reality, from the human to the divine, from the incomplete or imperfect to the all, the fullness or the perfection of Christ." A. Fitzgerald, *Ambrose, Paul and Expositio*, 141. Viktor Hahn has also underscored Ambrose's complete absorption in the Apostle Paul, so that more than merely citing the Apostle, Ambrose makes his thought patterns as his own. V. Hahn, *Das wahre Gesetz: Eine Untersuchung der Auffassung des Ambrosius von Mailand vom Verhältnis der beiden Testamente*, Münster 1969, 514.

<sup>31</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 17.

<sup>32</sup> The recreation of human beings according to their original prototype is a pervasive theme in Ambrose's writings. For example, arguing for the divinity of Christ in *De fide ad Gratianum*, Ambrose appeals against the Arians to *Gen.* 1, 26 for the unity of the Father and the Son in the creative act. The Son is by nature the image of the invisible God (*Col.* 1, 15); human beings, on the other hand, share this image by participation. The bishop writes, "Therefore the Father has said: 'Let us make man in Our image and likeness.'" At the beginning of the universe itself, as I read, the Father and the Son existed, and I see one creation. I hear Him that speaks. I acknowledge Him that does: but it is of one image, one likeness, that I read. This likeness belongs not to diversity but to unity. What, therefore, you claim for yourself, you take from the Son of God, seeing, indeed, that you cannot be in the image of God, save by help of the image of God." Ambr., *fid* 1, 53 (ed. H. Romestin [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 10]). Thus, human participation in the *imago Dei* after the fall is, for Ambrose, a participation in Christ who restores the image lost on account of sin.

The vast majority of the occurrences of *participatio* in Ambrose's commentary are from his reflection on verse 63: "I am a partaker of those that fear you, and keep your commandments." This, according to Ambrose, is the voice of Christ speaking prophetically in the *Psalms*, attesting to his redemptive union with the human race. Ambrose's ecclesiology develops out of the soteriological reflection of Christ's incarnation, whereby human beings come to be companions of Christ and members of his body: "Christ, too, has his partakers and companions (*habet et Christus participes atque consortes sui*)."<sup>33</sup> The companions of Christ are his fellow human beings, explains Ambrose: "He has partakers in the flesh, (*habet participes carnis*) because he took on flesh."<sup>34</sup> The incarnation is the means through which Christ establishes his Church. One is incorporated into Christ's body by sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Christ:

Christ has companions in baptism (*consortes baptismi*), because he was baptized for us. He has companions in justice (*consortes iustitiae*) because he himself is justice and has granted us a share in his justice (*habere consortium*). He has companions in truth (*consortes veritatis*) because he himself is truth and wants us to possess truth. He has companions in the resurrection (*consortes resurrectionis*) because he himself is the resurrection. He has companions in the immaculate life (*consortes immaculatae vitae*) because he himself is immaculate.<sup>35</sup>

Here we see Ambrose demonstrating that in each of Christ's human actions he goes before his members allowing them to participate in what he is by nature – justice, truth, and life. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians is marshaled with Ambrose recounting the Apostle rejoicing in his suffering because in his own flesh he can "make up for what is lacking in the passion of Christ, for the sake of his body the Church" (*Col.* 1, 24).<sup>36</sup> Christ also has partakers of his tribulation (*habet etiam tribulationis suae participes*), explains Ambrose, and he insist that in rejoicing in his sufferings the Apostle

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<sup>33</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 53.

<sup>35</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 53.

demonstrates his eagerness to be a companion of Christ, to rise with him as a co-heir.<sup>37</sup>

Appealing – as Augustine does frequently, as well – to *Mt.* 25, Ambrose writes, “Anyone can be a partaker of Christ, if they console those who grieve and are heavy of heart. If they are kind and offer their service to those in prison. If they visit the sick.... If they clothe the naked and feed the hungry.”<sup>38</sup> As we will see is the case in Augustine, so also for Ambrose, ministering to the vulnerable is not simply an act of mercy commanded by Christ, but is the means through which Christ offers himself. Being *consortes* with the vulnerable is to be members of Christ’s body: “For Christ is frequently found in people such as these, as he himself says, “*I was in prison and you never visited me, naked and you never clothed me ... in so far as you neglected to do this to one of these you neglected to do it to me.*”<sup>39</sup> *Mt.* 25 is united with the theology of the *imago Dei*, giving theological backing to Ambrose’s castigation of moral injustice:

Can you now see that we walk among many images of Christ? .... When we think we can wrong men made in the image of God we ignore the fact that we are piling insults on the image of God. For, ‘Whoever despises the poor insults his Creator’ (*Ps.* 17, 5). One is to come who will say: ‘I was hungry and you never gave me food; thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; sick and you never visited me’ (*Mt.* 25, 40).<sup>40</sup>

Ambrose’s insistence on social justice, patent both here and in much of his preaching, is infused with the theological implication of participating in the *imago Dei*.

Ambrose’s ecclesiology anticipates the *totus Christus* theology of Augustine’s *Psalms* commentary. In participating with the weak and

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<sup>37</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 53. Ambrose writes, “What shall we be when it comes to sharing your glory, if already by sharing in your reproach we are glorious (*tuae igitur gloriae participatione quid erimus*)?” (Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 5, 42).

<sup>38</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 26. Cf. Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 10, 25: “We see a poor person and we honour in that poor person him in whose image he was made. We honour him in the poor person for Christ said, ‘You gave me food, because what you gave to one of them, you gave to me.’”

vulnerable, insists Ambrose, we are united with Christ: "If I hate falsehood, I am a partaker of Christ (*particeps Christi sum*) because Christ is truth. If I fly from injustice, I am a partaker of Christ (*particeps Christi sum*), because Christ is justice. Happy the one who can say this. We say that a member is part of the whole body."<sup>41</sup> Clearly, Ambrose is alluding to St. Paul's ecclesiology in *1 Cor.* 12: "Each is a partaker of Christ's body which is the Church (*particeps corporis Christi est quae ecclesia*)".<sup>42</sup> Ambrose's theology of participating with Christ in the marginalized develops out of the Pauline theology of the body of Christ. Following the Apostle, Ambrose insists the rich have need of the poor, the noble of the simple, the healthy of the sick, the strong of the weak, and the learned of the unlearned.<sup>43</sup>

We have seen that a critical facet of Ambrose's account of participation is his theology of the *imago Dei*. This precious gift is proper to the soul of the human person, as opposed to his body, and, according to Ambrose, should be treasured so that it not be lost. In turning away from God the human person becomes less than what he was created to be. In sharing with the vulnerable and weak, however, human beings can come to participate once again in Christ's body. Recreation in Christ, who is *the* image of God, follows the pattern set in creation. Ambrose offers a theologically rich and robust account of participation by weaving together the theology of the *imago Dei*, Christ's identification with the vulnerable in Matthew 25, and St. Paul's theology of the body of Christ.

*Augustine's Enarratio in psalmum cxviii.*

*Participatio* is a dominant theological motif in Augustine's work. Prior to analyzing Augustine's use of the term in *Psalm* 118 with respect to the *imago Dei* I will look at his use of the term in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* more broadly. In the rest of Augustine's commentary on the Psalter, *participatio* functions similarly to his use in *Psalm* 118. The term bespeaks both human participation in Christ in reference to deification, and a downward participation in which Christ comes to participate in our humanity. Clearly, these two uses of *participatio* are inextricably interwoven. It is Christ's humility and

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<sup>41</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Ambr., in *psalm.* 118 8, 54.

grace coming to human weakness that allows for human participation in the divine life. Lastly, we will see that this union, made possible by grace, is the source of Augustine *totus Christus* ecclesiology.

*Psalm* 118 is the last psalm on which Augustine writes sermons. They are dated around 422, approximately thirty years after Ambrose's homilies on the same psalm. The exposition consists of 32 homilies that follow the acrostic structure of the *Psalm*. The exposition is unique in being expressly more recondite on account of the *Psalm* itself and due to its anti-Pelagian context.<sup>44</sup> After preaching and dictating his sermons on the entire Psalter, Augustine writes in the prologue that he has left *Psalm* 118 untouched: "But always I put off the exposition of *Psalm* 118, not so much because of its formidable length as because of its profundity, which few can fathom."<sup>45</sup> Despite much insistence from his brethren, Augustine put off writing a commentary on the *Psalm* because it "seemed far beyond the powers of my mind."<sup>46</sup> When at last he decided to exposit *Psalm* 118 he did so in a series of "public sermons" preached to the people.<sup>47</sup>

Anne-Marie la Bonnardière has devoted a chapter of her *Recherches de la chronologie augustinienne* to Augustine's *Enarratio in psalmum cxviii*. She considers *en. Ps. 118* a model series of homilies that Augustine preached so that other, less able preachers, might profit from his example. La Bonnardière suggests that Augustine was following his own advice set out in *de doctrina christiana* 4, 29, 62 that better preachers should demonstrate preaching to those preachers less-well equipped. Two elements support her thesis. First, the homilies display theological sophistication beyond what is generally presented in Augustine's homilies: The law-grace dialectic is explored,

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<sup>44</sup> Kannengiesser writes, "Voilà une différence notable entre ce commentaire et les autres Enarrationes: il est d'abord réservé à cette élite, censée pénétrer les secrets du psaume à commenter." Ch. Kannengiesser, *Enarratio in psalmum cxviii: Science de la révélation et progrès spirituel*, in *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962), 364.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms*, ed. M. Boulding, New York 2003; *en. Ps. 118*, prologue. Incidentally the exposition on *Psalm* 118 is the only psalm in Augustine's *Enarrationes* for which he pens a prologue.

<sup>46</sup> *En. Ps. 118*, prologue.

<sup>47</sup> *En. Ps. 118*, prologue. Not all Augustine's homilies in the *Enarrationes* were publically preached; the commentaries on some Psalms contain multiple versions, some of which are merely exegetical notes on the respective Psalm.

the justice of God, the role of faith and prayer, and the place of will and action. Thomas Martin has noted the erudite nature of the homilies, particularly Augustine's commitment to rigorous textual analysis: "He cites Greek codices often, complemented by a variety of Latin codices with variant readings. Expressions such as '*ut nonnulli codices habent*' occur repeatedly. One can picture Augustine seated before a vast work table, piled high with Greek and Latin versions of the Psalter".<sup>48</sup> Second, the *prooemium* to the work explains that it was intended for his brethren (*fratres mei*). Martin has explored who these "brethren" might be. He suggests that they are both the members of his *monasterium clericorum* in Hippo and perhaps also his fellow "brethren" in the episcopate endowed with the office of teaching and preaching.<sup>49</sup>

A search of Augustine's works reveals 585 uses of a form of the word *participatio*. It is a centrifugal theme around which various other words and concepts revolve, including *connectere*,<sup>50</sup> *adhaerere*,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "[Augustine] is, indeed, writing for intellectually and theologically advanced brethren who are concerned with how to read Scripture correctly yet critically." Th. F. Martin, *Exercises in grace: Augustine's* En. in Ps. 118, in *Augustiniana* 54 (2004), 151. Fiedrowicz has also argued that given the intellectual audience of *en. Ps. 118* Augustine could dare to be more theologically speculative: "Vielmehr dürfte Augustinus Ps 118 vor einem kleineren Kreis seiner Kleriker zu deren homiletischer Instruktion ausgelegt und als Predigthilfe schriftlich niedergelegt haben." M. Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christi*, Freiburg 1997, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Th. F. Martin, *Exercises in grace*, 153. Cf. P. Monceaux, *La formule, 'qui mecum sunt fratres' dans la correspondance de saint Augustin*, in *Mélanges Paul Thomas*, Bruges 1930, 529-537.

<sup>50</sup> *Connectere* has a sense of being "linked with" or "united to." In the *Enarrationes* it occurs primarily in Augustine's warnings of being "linked to sin" (e.g. *en. Ps. 57*, 4). In the exposition of *Psalm 118* it bespeaks the relation (*connectuntur*) between two verses (*en. Ps. 118*, 4, 5. and *en. Ps. 118*, 14, 1).

<sup>51</sup> *Adhaerere* bespeaks a union or close adherence. It is used in reference to spousal relation (*en. Ps. 37*, 6; 101, 1-2), consorting with evil (*en. Ps. 93*, 24), holding fast to faith, hope and love (*en. Ps. 100*, 3), words sticking in the throat (*en. Ps. 136*, 17) and most frequently union with God (*mihi adhaerere deo bonum est*) (e.g. *en. Ps. 43*, 25). In *Enarrationes 118* Augustine comments on verse 25: "My soul is stuck to the hard floor; give me life according to your word." The "hard floor" bespeaks earthly cares and desires. "To stick fast (*adhaerere*) in earthly things is death to the soul" (*en. Ps. 118*, 10, 1). And

*cohaerere*,<sup>52</sup> and *deificare*.<sup>53</sup> The broad semantic range of *participatio* revolves, as in Ambrose, around “sharing in” and bespeaks an intimate relationship. Apart from his exegesis of *Psalm* 118, an important text for an account of participation in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* is *en. Ps.* 49, 1, 2.<sup>54</sup> Here Augustine discusses deification and distinguishes those who are made gods by grace and Him who is God by nature. While human beings are deified by participating in God, Christ “is

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so Augustine urges his listeners not to cling (*adhaerebunt*) to the body, but to God: “*mihi autem adhaerere deo bonum est, ut uiuant corpora ex nobis, adhaerendo nobis; nos autem uiuamus ex deo, quia nobis adhaerere deo bonum est*” (*en. Ps.* 118, 10, 2).

<sup>52</sup> *Cohaerere* expresses a more physical contact; a sticking, clinging, holding, or growing together. Augustine uses it to express union with Christ the Head (*adiungatur et cohaereat capiti suo*) (*en. Ps.* 3, 9 and *en. Ps.* 63, 1), union with God (e.g. *en. Ps.* 17, 36), or the devil (*en. Ps.* 47, 3.), union with the Church (*en. Ps.* 67, 17), or the brotherhood (*en. Ps.* 136, 17). “With one side of yourself you cling loyally to God (*cohaeres deo*), with another side of you you are pleasurably attached to the world (*delectaris saeculo*); and the side of you that is attached to the world fights against the mind that cleaves to God. Let it go on clinging and cleaving to him, let it not weaken (*cohaereat, cohaereat, non deficiat*).” (*en. Ps.* 63, 9). In *Enarrationes* 118 *cohaerere* describes the close union with the law for which the Psalmist prays (*en. Ps.* 118, 22, 2 and *en. Ps.* 118, 26, 9).

<sup>53</sup> *Deificare* and its cognates appear only four times in the entire *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Three times in *en. Ps.* 49, 2 (see below) and once where Augustine describes the power of the Lord’s right hand to exult the humble and deify the mortal (*en. Ps.* 117, 11).

<sup>54</sup> “It is quite obvious that God called human beings ‘gods’ in the sense that they were deified by his grace, not because they were born of his own substance. It is proper to God to justify us because he is just of himself and not by derivation from anyone else; and similarly he alone deifies who is God of himself, not by participation in any other. Moreover he who justifies is the same as he who deifies, because by justifying us he made us sons and daughters of God: *he gave them power to become children of God* (*Io.* 1, 12). If we have been made children of God, we have been made into gods; but we are such by the grace of him who adopts us, not because we are of the same nature as the one who begets .... Others, who become gods, become so by his grace. They are not born of God’s very being in such a way that they are what he is; it is through a gracious gift that they come to him and become with Christ his coheirs.” *En. Ps.* 49, 2.

God of himself, not by participation in any other.”<sup>55</sup> Augustine links deification with justification, insisting that not only is the same power at work in justifying as in deifying, but that deification is the terminus of justification. Likewise in *En. Ps.* 58, 1, 7 Augustine writes that Christ, the *doctor humilitatis*, came to participate in our infirmity that we might participate in his divinity thereby teaching us through his humility (“*particeps nostrae infirmitatis, donans participationem suae diuinitatis*”). Not only does Augustine here also link deification with the term *participatio*, but he expands the concept to include a “downward participation” whereby Christ comes to share in human weakness. Thus, in Augustine’s thought there is a mutual participation by which weakness partakes of strength and strength of weakness.

Unique to Augustine’s exegesis of *Psalm* 118 is his emphasis on grace in the discussion of *participatio*. To share in the life of God is not proper to the human person by nature, but flows from the gracious gift of Christ’s incarnation. Thus, in his exposition on *Psalm* 118 Augustine comments, “Human beings do not of course, become gods, but they are divinized by participating in him who alone is true God.”<sup>56</sup> Twenty times in his commentary on *Psalm* 118 Augustine uses a form of the word *participatio*, insisting that “anyone who clings to the Lord participates in him,”<sup>57</sup> but he participates only on account of Christ who became a participant of our mortality (*particeps mortalitatis nostrae*).<sup>58</sup> The graced sharing of natures is the context in which *participatio* occurs in Augustine’s exposition: “He became a sharer in our mortality that we might become sharers in his divinity; we have become a participant in the one Christ unto life, because he partook with many unto death.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, as in Ambrose’s sermons on *Psalm* 118, so in Augustine’s homilies on this *Psalm*, participation is a recurring theme. The context, however, is different. Augustine’s homilies display a critical

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<sup>55</sup> *En. Ps.* 49 1, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 1.

<sup>57</sup> *En. Ps.* 16, 1.

<sup>58</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Quia factus est particeps mortalitatis nostrae, ut et nos participes diuinitatis ipsius fieremus; nos unius participes ad uitam, ad mortem uero particeps ille multorum.* Aug., *en. Ps.* 118, 19, 6.



engagement with Pelagian theology.<sup>60</sup> Despite his Pelagian antagonists remaining unnamed, there is a sustained emphasis on the primacy and necessity of grace in the face of radical human insufficiency before God and on the necessity of faith for the life of charity. Clearly alluding to Pelagian theology, Augustine pointedly exclaims in one of the first tracts on the *Psalm*, "Some people hold, however, that in order to live righteously we need nothing more in the way of divine help than that God's commandments be brought to our notice, so that, once we know them, they can be fulfilled by the powers of our will alone, without any further grace from God."<sup>61</sup> Augustine insists that the opposite is the case. The law serves only to convict and "deal death" unless one is aided by grace.<sup>62</sup>

*Psalm* 118 is an encomium of praise on the glory of God's revelation in the law. Nevertheless, this law has need of grace to be effective, insists Augustine, appealing to *Rom.* 5.<sup>63</sup> To follow the law with one's whole heart, as the *Psalm* enjoins, is to do so in perfect

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<sup>60</sup> Kannengiesser's study of Augustine's homily on Psalm 118 focuses especially on its interaction with Pelagian theology. Ch. Kannengiesser, *Enarratio in psalmum cxviii*, 359-81. In the *en. Ps. 118*, 1 see a more sustained interaction with Pelagian theology than Thomas Martin who understands the *En. Ps. 118* to have been composed shortly after 422 when "the acrimonious and wearisome Pelagian debates were behind him." Th. F. Martin, *Exercises in grace*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> *En. Ps. 118*, 4, 2. Another clear example of Pelagian theology being on Augustine's radar is evident later on: "Christ is the end for the law, bringing justification to everyone who believes, a justification that comes freely through his grace. His enemies are in quite a different situation, for they aspire to observe the law by their own efforts and strive to establish a righteousness which, though apparently conformed to God's law, is in essence their own. The psalmist, by contrast, is like a child of promise who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, and by asking, seeking, and knocking begs it from his Father, knowing that as one adopted through the only-begotten Son he will receive it" (*en. Ps. 118*, 22, 2).

<sup>62</sup> Augustine writes, "Without grace he will have God's law, but not as a reassurance; if he tries to pry into commandments which he is not keeping, they will shame him" (*En. Ps. 118*, 4, 3).

<sup>63</sup> *Rom.* 5 played an exulted role in Augustine's writing against the Pelagians. Cf. A.-M. La Bonnardière, *Le verset paulinien Rom. V, 5, dans l'oeuvre de S. Augustin*, in *Augustinus Magister. Congrès international Augustinien, Paris, 21-24 septembre 1954*, vol. 1, Paris 1954, 657-665.

love of God and neighbor. The human person remains “quite incapable of doing this by his own strength; he needs help from the author of the commandment to do what is commanded. He prays, therefore, ‘Lead me in the path of your commandments, because that is what I have willed.’ My own will is insufficient; you must yourself lead me in what I have willed.”<sup>64</sup> In the *Psalm* most well known for praising Israel’s gift of the law, Augustine meditates on the dialectic of grace and law, concluding, “The function of law is to send us to grace.”<sup>65</sup> In the face of his Pelagian interlocutors Augustine is eager to present a harmonious theology of Romans and *Psalm* 118.

A sustained interaction with *Rom.* 3 leads Augustine to conclude that all are in the bonds of original sin and to be counted as lawbreakers: “Nothing therefore was left for humanity, except that God’s righteousness should come to its rescue: not its own, but God’s, the righteousness conferred by God.”<sup>66</sup> Augustine’s exegesis of *Rom.* 3 takes on special poignancy when considered in light of the Pelagian polemic. The law serves only to bring awareness of one’s guilt. And yet the Psalmist can claim, “I have loved your testimonies.” This, explains Augustine, is because the law points to the utter lack of righteousness within us and “forces us to flee to the life-giving Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> Even Paul, who ran the race so as to win the prize, wrote that the “outcome depends ‘not on the one who wills it, nor on the one who runs, but on God who shows mercy’ (*Rom.* 9, 16). He kept the faith, but how could he have done that unless, as he says himself, he had received the mercy that empowered him to remain faithful?”<sup>68</sup> The dialectic of law and grace in Romans is, then, a touchstone in Augustine’s homilies on *Psalm* 118.

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<sup>64</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 11, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 25, 5. “*Lex ... ad hoc prodest, ut mittat ad gratiam.*”

<sup>66</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 25, 5.

<sup>67</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 25, 5.

<sup>68</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 7, 2. Similarly, Augustine writes in another homily, “I remembered your name in the night, O Lord, and I kept your law”; but we shall not keep it by any righteousness of our own. Each of us will keep it to God’s glory, since any righteousness we have is not ours but God’s and is conferred on us by God. No one could have it by relying on his own strength and forgetting the name of the Lord” *en. Ps.* 15, 7.

It is in the context of the Pelagian polemic and of his insistence on the primacy of grace that we are presented with Augustine's theology of participation. Augustine is adamant that the righteousness bestowed is not extrinsic, but is a righteousness that becomes our own in Christ: "'With Christ I have been nailed to the cross; and now I live my own life no longer; it is Christ who lives in me' (*Gal.* 2, 19-20)."<sup>69</sup> No quarter is given to pride or boasting: "The righteousness in me is not my own righteousness obtained by the law, for the law only turned me into a violator of it. What is in me is God's righteousness, that which is from God, not from myself. The 'I' who lives is not myself but Christ."<sup>70</sup> The implications for justification are evident: Christ takes the human person into himself so that in him he might live a life of grace.

The Pelagian context of Augustine's homilies on *Psalm* 118 does not provide an opportune framework within which to present an account of participation in the *imago Dei* like the one we saw in Ambrose. The emphasis in Augustine's homilies on *Psalm* 118 is on our graced participation in Christ through the incarnation rather than on participation by way of the natural created order as in Ambrose's homily on the *Psalm*.<sup>71</sup> Gerald Bonner writes that Augustine understands participation to come about "not because the human soul is naturally divine (which is impossible because of its creaturely status), nor even because it is made in the image and likeness of God ... but because God has taken our humanity into Himself".<sup>72</sup> There is certainly a different theological nuance here than in Ambrose's account of the *imago Dei*; we saw how for Ambrose the state of the *imago* after sin is unstable. The primacy of grace and its manifestation in the incarnation is the context in which Augustine's homilies on *Psalm* 118 operate.

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<sup>69</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 25, 6.

<sup>70</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 25, 6.

<sup>71</sup> This is not to suggest that an account of participation in the *imago Dei* is not present in Augustine's writings, but only to remark on its absence in the homilies on *Psalm* 118. Cf. R. Teske, *The Image and Likeness of God in St. Augustine's De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*, in *Augustinianum* 30 (1990), 441-451.

<sup>72</sup> G. Bonner, *Augustine's Conception of Deification*, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), 374.

But what is the relationship between God's righteousness, which God is himself, and our righteousness, which is by way of gift? To say we participate in God's righteousness still leaves the character of "participated righteousness" elusive. Augustine provides us with a helpful analogy, commenting on the well-known verse, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path" (118:105). He explains that the Lord says to his Apostles, "You are the light of the world" (*Mt.* 5, 14). But, Augustine explains, Christ also speaks of himself as such: "I am the light of the world" (*Jo.* 8, 12). The Lord was thereby teaching his disciples the relationship between creaturely being and the being of the eternal Word in whom all things participate: "He was making it plain to them that they were like lamps ignited from the one light that burns unchangeably. No created being, not even a rational, intellectual creature, is the source of its own light; it is kindled by participation in everlasting truth (*participatione sempiternae veritatis accenditur*)."<sup>73</sup> The analogy demonstrates that for Augustine, as for Ambrose, redeemed existence follows the order of created existence. Just as created being is upheld and sustained in the eternal Word by participation in his being, so, too, redeemed creatures share in the righteousness of Christ in such a way that it becomes their own. For Augustine, then, people have righteousness in the same way that they have existence: by participation.<sup>74</sup>

We saw that in Ambrose's commentary on *Psalm* 118, the human person, restored through the incarnation, participates in God by way of the *imago Dei*. Augustine does not interact with theology of the *imago Dei* in his sermons on *Psalm* 118. Perhaps the rigorist theology of the Pelagians and their tendency to self-sufficiency are ill-suited to provide Augustine with a pastoral context to comment

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<sup>73</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 23, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Similarly Augustine writes in *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* 58, "Thus, whatever wisdom is in God is Wisdom, and is not wise by participating in wisdom. However, whatever soul is wise is wise on account of participation in that Wisdom." Meconi comments, "[P]articipation allows Augustine to maintain two levels of reality. The first level is the underived, immutable *per se* essence of some quality, e.g., Chastity or Wisdom. The second level is derived and tributary – those qualities found in mutable particulars, for example, in chaste and wise persons." D. V. Meconi, *The Incarnation and the Role of Participation in St. Augustine's Confessions*, in *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998), 66.

on the dignity and *telos* of the human person created in the *imago Dei*. Nevertheless, his exegesis of verse 63 (“I share with all those who fear you and keep your commandments”) follows a trajectory similar to the one we discovered in Ambrose’s commentary on this verse. Augustine, too, understands these words as a prophetic utterance of Christ. The African bishop writes, “I think the words that follow belong to [Christ] personally.”<sup>75</sup> For Augustine, however, there exists what James O’Donnell has termed a “downward” account of participation.<sup>76</sup> Augustine emphasizes Christ’s participation in our humanity.<sup>77</sup> Thus, he regards this verse as being in line with the letter to the Hebrews: “*He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one stock; that is why he is not ashamed to call them his brothers; and, a little further on, Since, ‘children’ share in the same flesh and blood, he too just as truly shared in them (Hbr. 2, 11-14)*.”<sup>78</sup> These verses unequivocally declare Christ to be a participant of our nature, explains Augustine (*quod quid est aliud, quam: eorum particeps factus est?*).<sup>79</sup> Expressing the exchange of natures, Augustine writes, “We should not have become sharers in his godhead if he had not become a sharer in our mortality (*neque enim efficeremur participes divinitatis eius, nisi ipse mortalitatis nostrae particeps fieret*).”<sup>80</sup> Only

<sup>75</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.

<sup>76</sup> J. O’Donnell, *Confessions: Commentary on Book 1-7*, vol. 2, Oxford 1992, 463.

<sup>77</sup> Christ’s participation in our humanity is a theme that struck a chord with Augustine in the *Confessions*. That the immutable Word comes to participate in our humanity was a teaching of Scripture utterly foreign to the books of the Platonists that he had before encountered: “[The humble] are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak. They see at their feet divinity became weak by sharing in our ‘coat of skin’ (*infirmam divinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae*) (*Gen.* 3, 21).” *Conf.* 7, 24 (Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. H. Chandwick, Oxford 1998).

<sup>78</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.

<sup>79</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.

<sup>80</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6. Gerald Bonner’s analysis of deification in Augustine’s thought is germane here. Although forms of the verb *deificare* appear only fifteen times in Augustine’s corpus, the theological principle of deification is certainly more pervasive – as it is in this homily. Bonner rightly advances the thesis that deification is much more ostensible in the content of Augustine’s theological work than the frequency of the exact term would lead one to think. Bonner also raises (but does not answer) the fascinating questions of the influence of neo-Platonism in Augustine’s account of deification and

because Christ came to “share in our mortality” (*particeps mortalitatis nostrae*) do we become participants of his divinity (“*quod nos divinitatis eius participes facti sumus*”).<sup>81</sup>

As would be expected from Augustine’s commentary on the Psalms, an ecclesiology quickly develops in his discussion of participation. While Augustine regards the speaker as the prophetic Christ, he makes clear that this does not at all mean the members of his body are excluded: “But he says certain things in the person of his members, in the unity of his body, as though in the voice of a single human being diffused throughout the whole world and continually growing as the ages roll on; and other things he says in his own voice, as our head.”<sup>82</sup> Augustine makes clear that in either case – speaking as body or head – Christ is one with his body and speaks in union with it. Thus, while sometimes the Psalmist seems to speak from the head and sometimes from the body, we should understand him speaking as one “foreseeing the great sacrament of unity, of which Scripture says, *They will be two in one flesh*.”<sup>83</sup> A participatory account of redemption provides Augustine with the theological apparatus to respond to the Pelagian challenge. Christ speaking on behalf of his body places the redemptive imperative on the head rather than on the members, thereby not displaying “the

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the intimate relationship between justification and deification in Augustine’s theology. Cf. G. Bonner, *Augustine’s Conception of Deification*.

<sup>81</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6. Similarly, Augustine writes: “*I share with all those who fear you. He became a sharer in our mortality that we might become sharers in his divinity; we have become participants in the one Christ unto life, because he partook with many unto death. (Quia factus est particeps mortalitatis nostrae, ut et nos participes divinitatis ipsius fieremus; nos unius participes ad vitam, ad mortem vero particeps ille multorum.)*” *En. Ps.* 118, 19, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.

<sup>83</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 22, 3. Elsewhere in his commentary on *Psalm* 118, Augustine writes, “The Lord Jesus has just prayed for understanding to be conferred upon his body by God, that it may learn his commandments. He asked this favor through the prophet as though he were asking it on his own behalf, because the life of his body – his people, that is – is hidden with him in God; and so he himself experiences the need in his body and begs in the name of his members for all that they lack.” *En. Ps.* 118, 19, 1.

arrogance of free will trusting to itself in opposition to grace.”<sup>84</sup> It is the grace of God flowing through Christ the head that renders the body holy.<sup>85</sup>

*Conclusion.*

Ambrose's and Augustine's homilies on *Psalm* 118 develop within two different theological contexts. Nevertheless, for both authors participation is a recurring motif, while also for both the Christological perspective is key. For Ambrose participation is presented in the context of creation, particularly, the human person's creation in the *imago Dei*. Being created in the *imago Dei*, however, is still to be created and as such to be endowed with free will and its inevitable volatility. This state of volatility was the context of Adam's lapse; his ill-use of free will seems at times for Ambrose to imply that the *imago Dei* was completely lost in the fall. Christ restores the human person in the image to which he was created by participating in human nature, and so for Ambrose "Christ too has his partakers and companions."<sup>86</sup> The injunction to social justice that finds its place in so many of Ambrose's homilies is also represented in his sermons on *Psalm* 118 and accentuates his account of participation. In feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick we participate in Christ and are united with his body.

Writing around thirty years later, Augustine is embroiled in the Pelagian controversy; he comments on the *Psalm* praising the law by referring to Romans, where Paul discusses the law and the gospel of grace. Despite the public audience of his sermons, Augustine's homilies on *Psalm* 118 demonstrate a theologically sophisticated engagement with the law-grace dialectic. Augustine is adamant, in the face of his

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<sup>84</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 19, 7. In his introduction to Augustine's *Exposition on the Psalms* Michael Fiedrowicz has commented on how Augustine understands the Psalms to be the voice of Christ speaking of behalf of his Church: "By identifying the Church with even the earthly body of Christ Augustine was able to discover a mysterious involvement of humanity in the event of the cross. We were there (*nos ibi eramus*).” (*Exposition of the Psalms*, ed. M. Boulding, 54). For a detailed study of this principle see chapter 3 of M. Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christi. Studien zu Augustins Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Freiburg 1997.

<sup>85</sup> *En. Ps.* 118, 19, 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ambr., in psalm. 118* 8, 53.

Pelagian opponents, on the primacy of grace, which allows the law to be fulfilled. Without grace, the law serves only to deal death. Participation in Augustine's homilies is centered on the discussion of righteousness *vis-à-vis* the law. The human person comes to share in the righteousness of Christ in a similar way in which he shares in God's being; arguably, for Augustine, to share in Christ's righteousness is, in fact, to share in his being. What is God's by nature is given to the human person through Christ by way of gift. Through grace human beings really share in righteousness so that it becomes their own by way of participation.

Despite their dissimilar theological contexts, Ambrose and Augustine present consonant accounts of participation. For both bishops Christ is the locus of human participation in God, which becomes a reality through the incarnation. Despite different emphases the patristic dictum that God became man that man might become God is present in both exegetical works. Ambrose understands the incarnation as the restoration of the *imago Dei*, so that recreation follows the pattern of creation. For Augustine, Christ's righteousness is offered as a gift of grace, and the gift of participated righteousness is analogous to the gift of participated being. Thus, a profound correspondence exists between Ambrose's and Augustine's theologies of creation and restoration as participation in Christ: in both their expositions on *Psalms* 118 this participation finds its source in Christ's prophetic words in the psalm: "I share with all those who fear you and keep your commandments."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ambr., in *psalm*. 118 8, 53; Aug., *en. Ps.* 118, 16, 6.



## ABSTRACT

As bishops, both Augustine and Ambrose wrote sermons on Psalm 118 (119) towards the end of their lives. This article puts these two exegetical works in dialogue with each other by focusing on the common theological theme of *participation* operative in both commentaries. I argue that both Ambrose and Augustine present a Christological account of participation which functions as the basis of their respective ecclesiologies. Within this overarching Christological framework, the article notes that Ambrose grounds participation in the *imago Dei*, whereas Augustine's takes his starting point from the grace Christ offers through the incarnation.