

Commentary—From the Margins *from Augustine’s “Prologue”*

There are certain precepts for treating the Scriptures which I think may not inconveniently be translated to students. So that they may profit not only from reading the work of expositors but also in their own explanations of the sacred writings to others. (“Prologue.” *On Christian Doctrine*. D.W. Robertson trans. 1st sentence)

It has been more than three months since I wrote a Commentary: in these months I returned to Alaska and to the Coast after being away far longer than I desired. My desktop computer didn’t survive a TSA scan. The use of another has been obtained. And after a new meter base was installed on the property purchased, a fiber-optic phone line run, and Internet service reacquired, I’m again able to communicate with others beyond the hearing of my voice, but the main thing observed is how Internet-dependant commerce has become within the United States. Without the Internet, buying and selling (our transactional economy) ceases to function. Catalogues from suppliers refer potential customers to the suppliers’ on-line selection of goods. Simple things such as plumbing fixtures cannot be easily ordered, if obtained at all. And it is here where I want to begin again the ministry undertaken for the past fourteen years.

I sent my eight-year-old Ford pickup North on a barge in March. In doing so, I arrived in the Seattle area a couple of days before I was to deliver the pickup to the barge company; so I visited and stayed-with by brother Ben, now retired from the Forest Service but a first-responder following the Katrina hurricane disaster.

On the organizational flow chart of first-responders, his name is on the first line.

His observations of what went right and what went wrong following Katrina devastating the southern Gulf Coast has proven germane in my present situation: communication is everything. Without communication, nothing happens. And the problem Katrina first-responders encountered was the collapse of Gulf Coast communication systems.

No one was adequately prepared for the total collapse of the communication system: for a while, there was nowhere for first-responders to charge cell-phones, nor cell towers to convey signals. And not much got done, for which President George Bush received blame. However, the problem was the rapidity with which America had become dependent upon instantly available communication. Plus, the very nature of cellular communications precludes permanence.

Here in the Aleutians, everything moves at a slower pace: the mail plane arrives twice weekly. Sunday and Thursday. Mail is received on Monday and Friday. And the strength of AT&T’s cell signal was minus .8, thus making cellular communication difficult beyond sight of the tower.

When Augustine wrote (second sentence of *On Christian Doctrine’s* “Prologue”), “I have

undertaken to explain these rules to those able and willing to learn ...,” Augustine began a long discourse on what he, in the 4th-Century CE, believed was true. He is generally regarded as an ideological pillar of the greater Christian Church, but the entirety of his discourse is based on a false assumption:

This faith maintains and it must be believed: neither the soul nor the human body may suffer complete annihilation, but the impious shall rise again into everlasting punishment, and the just into life everlasting. (Book 1, section XXI.)

The Apostle Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death [not everlasting punishment], but the free gift of God is eternal life in [en] Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

Death is the absence of life. Death is not life in a barbeque that is not quite hot enough to turn flesh into charcoal ...

But scripturally, “death” has a complication that Jesus expressed in Matthew 8:22: “Follow Me and permit the dead to bury the dead of themselves” ... if the *dead* are to bury the dead of themselves, then humanity is confronted with two deaths, one “death” as an existing state of being in which the *dead* can perform physical work such as digging a hole in which they can place a corpse. The second state of “death” will have the physical body losing the life it has when humanly conceived and born as a “breathing creature.”

“Death” as an existing state of being is acknowledged in Christian theology through the concept of “original sin” ... but an inherent problem exists within this concept: the assumption that human persons, unlike other *nephesh*, are born with indwelling eternal life that comes only as a gift from God **in** Christ Jesus.

Has God given the gift of indwelling eternal life to all persons, including to those who have earned the wages of sin? No, He has not! So if God has not given the gift of eternal life to the wicked, how can the wicked—intentional sinners, not accidental sinners—receive this gift so that they can suffer everlasting punishment? And the simple answer is that the spiritually dead never “live” spiritually; for spiritual birth and life only comes with the receipt of the spirit of Christ [*pneuma Christou*].

The Apostle Paul seems to acknowledge two “holy spirits,” not one holy spirit [*pneuma 'agion*], when he writes by the hand of Tertius,

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if in fact the spirit of God [*pneuma Theou*] dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ [*pneuma Christou*] does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you [in the form of His spirit], although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead [Jesus didn't raise Himself from death] dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit that dwells in you. (Rom 8:9–11)

The problem Augustine experienced was found in the communication of the 4th-Century CE: even Judaism had begun to believe that humanity was humanly born with indwelling eternal life. ... But why would they believe this lie of the Adversary, who in the Genesis temptation account told Eve, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it [the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4–5).

Eve ate. Adam, seeing Eve eat and not die, ceased to believe God: Adam ate. And suddenly, both—previously covered by Adam's belief of God—realized they were naked. Neither had any spiritual covering; hence, introducing a spiritual problem Christians pastors have never resolved—

About what are most sermons within a Christian fellowship? Are they not about moral

issues; about knowing good from evil? Certainly they are. Christian pastors wouldn't have much to talk about if they stayed away from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Thus, they camp under this Tree and justify their existence by preaching about doing good and spurning evil. ... The person truly born of spirit through the indwelling of the spirit of God [*pneuma Theou*] in the spirit of Christ [*pneuma Christou*] in the spirit of the person [*to pneuma tou 'anthropou*] has been born of "spirit" through a relationship analogous to the physical relationship found in Adam entering into Eve and thereby conceiving Cain, Abel, and Seth, hence giving human birth to three sons, with Cain murdering righteous Abel and then Seth being the likeness and image of Adam (Gen 5:3).

Human sons of God, fathered by God and born spiritually from the spirit of the Father entering into the man Jesus (Mark 1:10), are conceived as sons of God when the spirit of Christ enters their spirit, thus giving spiritual birth to the inner self [soul] of a human person that was spiritually dead—and would have remained spiritually dead forever if no spiritual breath of life had been received through the indwelling spirit of Christ ... the Greek linguistic icon <*pneuma*> is best translated into Latin as <*spīritus*>, from which English speakers get the word <*spirit*>. However, in Greek and in Latin, the linguistic icons represent moving air as in a person's breath. Therefore, since God isn't a *nephesh*, a breathing creature, His "breath" isn't moving air, but the primal energy force by which God has life in a timeless supra-dimension known to humans as "heaven." This primal energy force would devour a physical entity if that entity had not also come from heaven. The indwelling of the spirit of God [*pneuma Theou*] would destroy a person if the spirit of God were not encased in the spirit of Christ [*pneuma Christou*]; therefore, no person can have indwelling immortal or eternal life except in the Christ Jesus, what the Apostle declared (again Rom 6:23). No person can suffer eternal punishment. Augustine was simply wrong in what he wrote—and in his instructions on how to read and explain to others the basic precepts found in Scripture.

Augustine's long treatise *On Christian Doctrine* professes to instruct "students"—lambs—how to read Scripture, a task given to the Apostle Peter in the addendum chapter (chapter 21) of John's Gospel. And what is it that Peter writes in his first epistle:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again [*anagennasas* — literally, *again born*] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power has been guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3–5)

This is the instruction students are to receive ... if a person is not born of spirit, the person remains numbered among the spiritually dead, well able to bury the "dead" of themselves, but absolutely unable to enter heaven or to escape *physicality*.

About all of this, I will write more as soon as I get my computer back from Dell, their warranty covering whatever occurred in the move to Adak.

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