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The Chains of Bondage and the Voice of a Child: Augustine's 'Reconciliation' of Free Will and Grace in the *Confessions*

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This article explores the age-old thorny question of free will through the lens of Augustine's story in Confessions. *The narrative helps to unpack the bondage of human nature and the place of habit.*

Introduction

Few topics have elicited as much theological speculation and debate in the history of Christianity as 'the *difficillima quaestio* of grace and free will.'[1] Regrettably, the default assumption concerning this 'difficult question' tends to be one of mutual exclusivity. In fact, one scholar has tritely framed the discussion as 'human free will *versus* divine efficacy.'[2] Given the perpetual contention surrounding the topic of human free will and divine grace, it is tempting to assert 'the impossibility of finding a definitive and satisfactory solution.'[3] Nevertheless, not all theologians have concluded that free will and grace are incompatible. According to Peter King, 'Augustine regarded his *reconciliation* of human free will and divine grace as one of his crowning achievements.'[4] Thus, revisiting Augustine's conception of free will and grace would help reframe the discussion.

Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430) was a prominent ecclesiastic, an eminent theologian, and a prolific writer. He is also remembered for his theology of grace, which declared that human beings, as sinners by nature and by choice, would be lost eternally without 'the succor of grace.'[5] For this reason, the Bishop of Hippo has frequently been referred to as '*doctor*

[1] Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-Called Semipelagians* (Leuven: University Press, 2003), p. 39.

[2] John Gahbauer, 'Saving Grace: A Look at Grace and Free Will and the Theories of Causation that Support Their Cooperation,' *Eudaimonia: the Georgetown Philosophical Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2004): p. 66. See also, William S. Babcock, 'Grace, Freedom and Justice: Augustine and the Christian Tradition,' *Perkins Journal* 26, no. 4 (Summer 1973): pp. 1–15.

[3] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, p. 1.

[4] Peter King, introduction to *'On the Free Choice of the Will,' 'On Grace and Free Choice,' and Other Writings*, by Augustine (ed. and trans. Peter King; Cambridge: University Press, 2010), p. xxxi, emphasis mine. Subsequent references are to chapter and section of this edition.

[5] Augustine, *On Grace and Free Choice*, 4.8.

gratiae ("teacher of grace")."[6] At the same time, Augustine insisted that grace does not replace the human will but works alongside it, enabling a person to have faith and to do good works.[7] It is this symbiosis of free will and grace that lies at the centre of Augustine's 'reconciliation.'

Although scholars frequently overlook it in favour of his theological treatises,[8] Augustine's *Confessions* also demonstrates his reconciliation of free will and grace. Pre-eminently, this involves the story of his conversion, which took place in the garden in Milan. Recorded in Book VIII of the *Confessions*, the garden experience is one of the 'parabolic events'[9] in the life of Augustine. As such, it presents a case study through which his experiential understanding of the interaction of free will and grace can be observed. Augustine's autobiography[10] is thus an indispensable and relatively untapped source for revisiting his conception of human free will and divine grace. In particular, two images from the conversion story are representative of free will and grace: the chains of bondage and the voice of a child, respectively. In the present essay, I will analyse the garden experience from the perspective of these two images in order to describe the interaction between free will and grace in Augustine's conversion. By means of this literary analysis, I will demonstrate that Augustine's 'reconciliation' consists in a co-operative interaction, as divine grace overcomes the obstacles to faith and rehabilitates the human will, thereby restoring the ability to choose faith in Christ.

On the Nature of the 'Conversion'

In Book VIII of his autobiography, the Bishop of Hippo recounts the details of his conversion, describing the tortuous process by which divine grace overcomes his inability to trust in Christ. In his own words, Augustine

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[6] William Harmless, ed., *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), p. 373.

[7] This is the main theme of *On Grace and Free Choice*, in which Augustine argues that through the grace of God, 'human will is (a) not taken away, but rather (b) changed from an evil to a good will, and (c) given assistance once it is good.' 20.41.

[8] For example, see J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980). In his comprehensive treatment of Augustine's doctrine of grace, Burns mentions the *Confessions* only in passing. This is a common feature of Augustine scholarship.

[9] Donald Capps, 'Parabolic Events in Augustine's Autobiography,' *Theology Today* 40, no. 3 (October 1983): pp. 260–272.

[10] For a consideration of the problems in categorising the *Confessions* as 'autobiography,' see Charles T. Mathewes, 'Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning,' in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's 'Confessions'* (ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), pp. 7–23.

suffers from 'a morbid condition of the mind,'[11] which prevents him from forsaking sin and turning to Christ. Despite a fervent struggle within his will, Augustine discovers that he cannot initiate faith. However, at the point of his greatest helplessness and despair, divine grace intervenes, prompting him to read a passage from the Bible. Upon doing so, Augustine is instantly enabled to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ.'[12]

Admittedly, many scholars do not accept the preceding account of Augustine's conversion. While they acknowledge that Augustine wrote such an account, they reinterpret it so as to change its meaning. Despite the fact that Augustine plainly describes the garden experience as a conversion (VIII.xii.30), most scholars deny that this represents 'the beginning of his faith.'[13] Indeed, they redefine the conversion as a simple turning from sexual sin to celibacy and an ascetic life.[14] At least one scholar has even accused Augustine of fabricating the conversion story.[15] The question thus becomes one of determining the nature of Augustine's conversion in Book VIII of the *Confessions*. Fortunately for the perplexed reader, Augustine did not remain silent on this issue.

In the *Confessions*, the conversion story is interpreted twice. The first instance is when Augustine and Alypius report their conversions to Monica. Augustine describes how his mother was overjoyed that her son now 'stood firm upon that rule of faith,' which God had previously revealed to her (VIII.xii.30). Here Augustine refers to both the dream and

[11] Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford: University Press, 1991), VIII.ix.21. All in-text references are to book, chapter, and section of this edition.

[12] Romans 13:14 (RSV).

[13] Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), p. 104. See also Tianyue Wu, 'Augustine on *Initium Fidei*: A Case Study of the Coexistence of Operative Grace and Free Decision of the Will,' *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 79, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1–38.

[14] For example, Garry Wills states, 'The garden scene is about giving up sex.' *Augustine's 'Confessions:' A Biography* (Princeton: University Press, 2011), p. 59. See also Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), pp. 90–104; and Lenka Karfíková, *Grace and the Will according to Augustine* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 93–96. Alternatively, Colin Starnes argues that in the garden Augustine was concerned with 'what he perceived as the necessity of submitting his will, totally, to that of Christ. This was the prerequisite to *any* form of Christian life, celibate or otherwise.' *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of 'Confessions' I–IX* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), p. 214.

[15] Leo C. Ferrari, 'Book Eight: Science and the Fictional Conversion Scene,' in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's 'Confessions,'* pp. 127–136. While not addressing any particular scholar, Carl Vaught assumes a different approach to the kinds of questions Ferrari asks. See Carl G. Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's 'Confessions:' Books VII–IX* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 19–22.

the prophetic word that Monica had received more than a decade prior, which foretold her son's conversion. Concerning the dream, Augustine reports that Monica was once reassured in a dream that her son, held by 'death' and doomed to 'perdition,' would someday be with her on the same 'rule' (III.xi.19). Concerning the prophetic word, Augustine recounts how God gave Monica 'another answer' when a bishop told her that 'it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish' (III.xii.21). The second instance in which Augustine interprets his conversion occurs in Book IX. Immediately following the conversion story, Augustine praises God for having 'snapped [his] chains' and rescued him from 'the depth of [his] dead condition' (IX.i.1). He then refers to Jesus Christ as 'my helper and redeemer' and to God as 'my salvation' (IX.i.1). These descriptions make it clear that Augustine understood God's actions as initiating inner transformation of the will, rather than as effecting a mere exchange of celibacy for sexual sin.

In their reinterpretations of the garden experience, many scholars overlook Augustine's explicit explanations concerning the nature of the conversion. On both occasions in which Augustine interprets the conversion story, he indicates that his peril was not solely temporal indulgences of the flesh but eternal punishment for sin.[16] Consequently, when God rescues him in the garden, Augustine refers to this as a 'conversion' from death to life. Rather than reinterpreting the conversion story, we ought to allow the author of the *Confessions* to interpret it for us. Provided we do so, we must understand the garden experience as Augustine's account of his conversion to Christ.

Chains: The Bondage of Sin

Augustine wrote the *Confessions* approximately a decade after his conversion.[17] In retrospect, he recognised that his turning to Christ had been impeded by a will bound by sin, which made his conversion impossible from a human perspective. This condition came about not only through the general debilitation of the will caused by the fallen state of postlapsarian humanity,[18] but also through habit formed over an extended period of time, stretching back into Augustine's childhood.

[16] As Vaught points out, 'the basic problem is the distortion of the will that leads away from God rather than the sexual dimension of experience that sometimes expresses it.' *Encounters with God*, p. 82.

[17] Augustine was converted to Christ in A.D. 386 and began writing the *Confessions* around A.D. 397. For a discussion of the dating, see John M. Quinn, *A Companion to the 'Confessions' of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 10, n2.

[18] Concerning Augustine's understanding of the bondage of the will as a result of the fall of Adam, see Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 1.11.22.77–1.11.22.78.

Having been dominated by sexual sin for nearly two decades, Augustine discovers in the garden in Milan that even when convinced of the truths of Christianity, he is unable to trust in Christ. In order to understand the necessity and power of God's grace in liberating Augustine from the power of sin, it is requisite to review his primary obstacle to faith.

Of the many sins Augustine confesses in his autobiography, it is sexual sin that rules him. While some scholars attempt to downplay the role of sexual sin in Augustine's life,[19] the author of the *Confessions* repeatedly indicates that sexual sin, with its detrimental effects on his will, was the main hindrance to his conversion. For example, he describes how he was overtaken by this sin at the age of sixteen: 'Sensual folly assumed domination over me, and I gave myself totally to it' (II.ii.4). So powerful was sexual sin that it kept Augustine from genuinely seeking God. In fact, he recalls a half-hearted prayer for sexual purity from his youth: 'Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet' (VIII.vii.17). Though cognisant of the sin that held him back from God, Augustine was powerless to seek freedom from it. Even after sending his beloved mistress and mother of his son back to Africa, he remained 'a slave of lust' (VI.xv.25). This enslavement, which began in childhood, would constitute Augustine's most powerful barrier to faith in adulthood.

Importantly, in recalling his helpless and hopeless condition, Augustine realises that sexual sin was not ultimately the problem; it was his will that needed liberation. Indeed, Augustine's sins 'are symptoms of an addiction that expresses a radical distortion of the will.'[20] Having lived so long with the pleasures of sexual immorality, Augustine discovers that his sin is the result of a habit that cannot be broken. According to Peter Brown, Augustine explains 'the permanence of evil in the human will…in terms of the compulsive force of habit, *consuetudo*.'[21] As the mind recalls past actions, the pleasure of those actions is also relived, creating a form of dependence, which persists in a cycle of memory and pleasure. This cycle ultimately leads to a compulsive habit, by which 'man [is] bound by the continuity of his inner life.'[22] Consequently, Augustine's habit of sexual sins, which he had developed in childhood, resulted in his will being held in bondage to sin.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine frequently employs the metaphor of a chain to depict his slavery to sin. As early as Book II, he reports being constrained by 'the clanking chain of my mortal condition' (II.ii.2).

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[19] For example, Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine's Sin* (New York: Viking, 2003), pp. 3–7.

[20] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 68.

[21] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 149.

[22] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 149.

Similarly, Augustine evokes the metaphor of a chain when describing his plight at the time of his conversion:

> [I] was bound not by an iron imposed by anyone else but by the iron of my own choice. The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint. (VIII.v.10)

Augustine here likens sin to chains of oppression, which restrict the human will, and he insists that it was with his own free choice that he had become a 'prisoner' to sexual sin. Importantly, Augustine indicates that prior to this voluntary enslavement he was not free in an absolute sense; instead, being 'a son of Adam' (VIII.x.22), his pre-existing condition rendered him vulnerable to sin and its enslaving effects.[23] Subsequently, he describes the brutality of the mind's imprisonment as a just penalty for freely chosen sin: 'The law of sin is the violence of habit by which even the unwilling mind is dragged down and held, as it deserves to be, since by its own choice it slipped into the habit' (VIII.v.12). For Augustine, the relationship between habit and the will's bondage is complex but logical: a distorted will results in passion; servitude to passion produces habit; habit not resisted leads to necessity; and necessity within the will is the proper penalty. Consequently, each 'link' in the chain of bondage is both freely chosen and justly restricting.

When he later desires to turn to Christ, Augustine finds that his bondage to sin has produced a divided will. Upon hearing Ponticianus' conversion story, Augustine is pricked in his conscience, but he is unable to forsake sin. He then recognises within him the existence of two conflicting wills, one desiring to turn to Christ and the other refusing to do so:

> In my own case, as I deliberated about serving my Lord God which I had long been disposed to do, the self which willed to serve was identical with the self which was unwilling. It was I. I was neither wholly willing nor wholly unwilling. So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. (VIII.x.22)

[23] Augustine had elucidated his understanding of the debilitated state of the human will in Adam's posterity as early as *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 3.18.51.173–3.20.55.187. For a detailed analysis of original sin in the *Confessions*, see Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's 'Confessions'* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987).

Faced with the decision to serve God or to remain in slavery to sin, Augustine observes that his desires are divided. He is trapped between being completely willing and completely unwilling. In this way, Augustine expresses his utter inability to come to saving faith in Christ on account of a divided will. Consequently, Vaught refers to Augustine's will as 'a center of power that requires transformation.'[24]

Having identified the division within his will, Augustine resumes the metaphor of a chain to depict a tug-of-war within his mind. Unable to choose between the eternal and the temporal, his soul is 'torn apart in a painful condition' (VIII.x.24). He then portrays himself as a prisoner languishing in a dungeon, afflicted by 'sickness' and 'torture,' and laments his bondage: 'I was twisting and turning in my chain until it would break completely' (VIII.xi.25). Despite perceiving liberation from sin, which is so deceptively close, Augustine remains impotent to break the 'chains' of his habit.

At this point, Augustine briefly approaches the point of turning to Christ, but he is incapable of initiating faith. Having reached the definitive moment of surrendering to God, Augustine pleads inwardly, 'Let it be now, let it be now' (VIII.xi.25). Regardless of his desperation, Augustine discovers he is indecisive: 'I was already moving towards a decision; I had almost taken it, and then I did not do so' (VIII.xi.25). Were coming to Christ merely a choice of the will, Augustine would certainly have done so in this passionate moment. However, the power of sexual sin retained its grip, as his 'old loves' (VIII.xi.26) kept him from faith. Wrestling with his conflicting wills, Augustine describes the conflict within his heart as 'a struggle of myself against myself' (VIII.xi.27). According to Quinn, Augustine's 'longing for conversion was hampered by his vacillating will.'[25] Once again, Augustine remains precipitously close to a decision, but the result of habit is a perilous paralysis: he is unable to act upon his desires and is thus in need of external assistance.

The Voice of a Child: Images of Prevenient Grace

Augustine subsequently describes how divine grace liberated him from the bondage of sin. In recounting the details of his conversion, he is careful to identify a series of instances in which prevenient grace prepared his will to turn to Christ. For example, conversations with both Simplicianus and Ponticianus become catalysts for Augustine's conversion.[26] In each case, Augustine attributes to God the initiatory action that prepares his will

[24] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 70.

[25] Quinn, *Companion to the 'Confessions,'* p. 424.

[26] For a discussion of the parallels between these events, see Quinn, *Companion to the 'Confessions,'* pp. 427–430.

for faith. The ensuing struggle to forsake sexual sin and trust in Christ is similarly viewed as an act of grace.

Desiring to trust in Christ yet lacking the power to do so, Augustine describes being 'in the middle of that grand struggle in my inner house, which I had vehemently stirred up with my soul in the intimate chamber of my heart' (VIII.viii.19). Overwhelmed by the turmoil within, Augustine enters the garden. He reports making several attempts at turning to Christ, but each time he is unsuccessful. Nevertheless, by 'wielding the double whip of fear and shame' (VIII.xi.25), God prevents the chains of habit from strengthening, which would have resulted in permanent bondage to sin. Markedly, Augustine refers to this divine scourging as 'a severe mercy' that prevents him from relapsing into his 'original condition' (VIII.xi.25). Thus, God graciously upholds Augustine in the midst of temptations, and this prevenient grace both enables him to recognise his powerlessness and subsequently empowers him to turn to God for rescue.

Augustine's recognition of his helpless condition becomes another occasion for divine grace. While attempting to release himself from the habit of sexual sin, Augustine is simultaneously confronted by the whispers of his 'old loves,' which tempt him to return to sensual pleasures, and 'the overwhelming force of habit,' which mockingly inquires, 'Do you think you can live without them?' (VIII.xi.26). When Augustine is at his most helpless, prevenient grace again assists him in the form of a vision. Standing in sharp contrast with the voices of sin that taunt him, Lady Continence speaks to Augustine 'without coquetry' (VIII.xi.27), inviting him to leave behind his life of sexual impurity and to trust in the Lord. At the heart of this invitation is the call of faith, and the reward is the healing from bondage to sin that he so desperately needs. Wedged between the call of faith and the whispers of sin, Augustine is embarrassed by his discovery: 'I remained undecided' (VIII.xi.27). Therefore, Vaught aptly asserts that 'the only thing that will remove [Augustine's] suspense is the voice of God that addresses him directly.'[27]

The final instance of prevenient grace comes in the voice of a child. Overwhelmed by the emotions triggered by his internal struggle, Augustine leaves Alypius in order to weep in solitude. Simultaneously lamenting and pleading, he asks, 'How long, how long is it to be? Tomorrow, tomorrow. Why not now? Why not an end to my impure life this very hour?' (VIII.xii.28). In the midst of weeping for his piteous condition, Augustine is once more interrupted by divine grace. He reports suddenly hearing a child's voice chanting, 'Pick up and read, pick up and read' (VIII.xii.29). Notably, this was not an isolated occurrence, as the voice repeated the command continuously. Unable to determine its source and identity, Augustine perceives the voice to be from God: 'I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book [i.e. the Scriptures]

[27] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 88.

and read the first chapter I might find' (VIII.xii.29). In obedience to this command, Augustine returns to Alypius, opens up the book of Paul's letters, and reads Romans 13:13–14. Significantly, this passage contains the exhortation to forsake sexual sin and to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' by faith. According to Vaught, the process called for by the text involves identifying with Christ in his incarnation, death, and resurrection.[28]

As a result of the divinely-prompted reading, Augustine is instantly changed. At the opening of Book VIII, he had articulated his need for a secure relationship with God: 'My desire was not to be more certain of you but to be more stable in you' (VIII.i.1). Now having read from the thirteenth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, Augustine reports undergoing internal transformation:

> I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled. (VIII.xii.29)

Sensing that the biblical text acutely addresses his situation, Augustine simultaneously experiences release from sin's bondage and receives the assurance of faith for which he has been desperately longing. As the final act of divine grace in the garden experience, God ordains that in responding to the child's voice, Augustine would read a passage that both exposes his specific sin and enables him to trust in Christ. No longer burdened by the chains of 'anxiety' and 'doubt' caused by habit, Augustine's will is free to choose faith. In this way, divine grace overcomes decades of struggle with lust and sexual sin, converting Augustine at the age of thirty-two.

Observing the 'Reconciliation'

The preceding analysis of the 'parabolic event' of the garden experience presents the reader with two metaphors representing the interaction between free will and grace. On the one hand, the chains of bondage represent human free will. Augustine reports that as a result of sins he had chosen, predominately sexual sin, he was bound by chains. Even when convinced of his need for salvation, Augustine discovers that he is 'weighed down by habit' (VIII.ix.21), and he laments his inability to break free from the chains. Moreover, the chains of bondage also symbolise the divided will that afflicts Augustine on account of his sin; he simultaneously desires and desires not to turn to God by faith. Later reflecting on his bondage to sin, Augustine realises that free will was useless to him without God's help: 'The nub of the problem was to reject

[28] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, pp. 97–98.

my own will and to desire yours. But where through so many years was my freedom of will?' (IX.i.1). However, he remained in a struggle, torn between conflicting wills, and 'the bondage of the will that results from this fact leads him to cry for redemption that only the grace of God can provide.'[29] Thus, Augustine's only hope for liberation was an intervention of divine grace.

On the other hand, the voice of a child represents divine grace in the story of Augustine's conversion to Christ. Despite his desire to turn to Christ and live, Augustine remains weighed down by habit, and he is consequently unable to overcome his divided will. The fallen state of Augustine's will necessitates a prevenient work of grace, which could both liberate it from sin and enable it to have faith. In the garden, God meets Augustine's deepest need through the supernatural voice of a child. In response to the commandment of the child/God, Augustine opens the Scriptures, reads a passage that addresses his sin and invites him to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ,' and responds to the invitation. Therefore, the grace of God in the form of a child's voice has initiated the salvation process, enabling Augustine to proceed on the path of faith.

In Augustine's conversion, the chains of bondage and the voice of a child are images that serve to reveal the invisible interaction between the human will and divine grace. The garden experience demonstrates that Augustine understood conversion to be not an exercise of the will but an event initiated by the sovereign grace of God. As Vaught points out, Augustine discovers in the garden that 'the remedy for the bondage of sin, and for the addiction that expresses it, requires more than the freedom of the will. It also requires the grace of God.'[30] As a result of prevenient grace, Augustine's will is rehabilitated and thereby enabled to trust in Christ. Importantly, the initiatory and rehabilitative actions of grace do not preclude the human will; rather, they enable the will to function as it was originally designed. Therefore, the conversion of Augustine in the garden in Milan suggests that God alone can rescue humans from their freely chosen enslavement to sin, and the images of chains of bondage and the voice of a child display the co-operative nature of free will and grace.

Conclusion

To read Augustine's conversion story in Book VIII of the *Confessions* is to read of a man bound by sin yet liberated by divine grace. In recounting his conversion to Christ, Augustine mentions two seemingly contradictory themes, namely human free will and divine grace. Much of church history has been marked by disputes stemming from the theological and

[29] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 79.
[30] Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 75.

philosophical complexities raised by Augustine's teachings about human free will and divine grace. Notably, the respective positions adopted in these disputes have often shared the notion that free will and grace are mutually exclusive. Through a literary analysis of Augustine's conversion story, this paper has demonstrated that the Bishop of Hippo's reconciliation of free will and grace was based upon an understanding that the two elements are in fact compatible. Indeed, the garden experience is an important case study that displays Augustine's experiential understanding of the co-operative nature of human free will and divine grace.

The preceding reconsideration of the 'difficult question' of the relationship between free will and divine grace has demonstrated that Augustine understood free will and grace to be co-operative, not incompatible. As an essential part of humanity, the human will is free with respect to its choices; nevertheless, freely chosen sin produces enslavement of the will. Consequently, God must first overcome a person's evil will in order to enable him or her to turn to Christ. Only a will thus renewed and empowered can freely choose to have faith. The message of the garden experience is that the radical transformation that occurs within Augustine cannot take place without the initiatory work of the grace of God, and in response to this grace, the will freely embraces God as its highest treasure:

> Suddenly it had become sweet to me to be without the sweets of folly. What I once feared to lose was now a delight to dismiss. You turned them out and entered to take their place…And I was now talking with you, Lord my God, my radiance, my wealth, and my salvation. (IX.i.1)

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