

# "ALL THINGS IN WISDOM"

## Reading the Prologue to the Gospel of John with St. Augustine

~ William M. Wright IV ~

*Duquesne University*

### *Introduction*

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel according to John, more commonly known as the Prologue, envision all things in relation to the Word (or Son) of God.<sup>1</sup> The Prologue's opening words, "In the beginning" (John 1:1), are a deliberate allusion to the beginning of the Book of Genesis, and through this allusion, the Prologue signals to its audience that it is providing a "re-reading" of things in several respects.<sup>2</sup>

First, given that the Book of Genesis opens the biblical canon, the Prologue's allusion to Genesis 1:1 indicates that it is offering a summarized version of the whole biblical drama in light of the Incarnate Word. The Prologue moves from the creation of all things through the Word (1:1–5), the prophetic witness to that Word (1:6–8, 15), to the presence and activity of the Word in creation generally and in the history of Israel specifically (1:9–13), and it culminates in the incarnation of the Word and the gifts made available to humanity through him (1:14–18).

Second, as Genesis 1:1 introduces the creation accounts in Genesis, the Prologue envisions the whole of creation in relation to God's Word. Making use of biblical traditions about God's Word and Wisdom (for example, Wisd. 9:1–9), the Prologue presents all created reality existing in relation to and by virtue of the Divine Word.

Third, the Prologue goes beyond the canonical narrative and the whole of creation to provide a glimpse of the inner-life of the Godhead as an eternal

---

1 For a fuller exposition of John's Prologue, see Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, *forthcoming*), chapter 1; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 149–170; Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001): 243–284; Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible 29–29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1.1–37; Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 33–48; Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," in *New Interpreter's Bible* 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 515–524; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. by Kevin Smyth et al., 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1968–1982), 1.221–281.

2 In this article, when Scriptural texts are being quoted in their own right, the translations will be my own from the original text. However, when they are being quoted in the context of Augustine's exegesis, I will quote from Augustine's Latin text of Scripture as it is rendered in Hill's translation of Augustine.

exchange of life and love between God and his Word (or, the Father and the Son; compare 1:1, 14, 18).

The basis of the Prologue's envisioning or "re-reading" of these three things—the canonical narrative, the whole of creation, and the inner-life of God—is the revelation given in the Divine Word made flesh: Jesus of Nazareth.

The subject matter of John's Prologue is most profound, and quite appropriately, this text and its contents have been contemplated by saints and scholars throughout the history of the Church. Consistent with longstanding tradition, the Second Vatican Council states that the Church "strives to reach day by day a more profound understanding of the sacred Scriptures, in order to provide her children with food from the divine words."<sup>3</sup> The Council goes on to specify that in order to move into "a more profound understanding" of Scripture, the Church "duly fosters the study of the Fathers, both Eastern and Western, and of the sacred liturgies."<sup>4</sup> The Council here reaffirms that the biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers constitutes a valuable resource and guide for progressing into a deeper understanding of Scripture.

These hermeneutical prescriptions of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God] coincide (to an extent) with some interests of the growing scholarly field of biblical reception history. Biblical reception history is the scholarly study of periods, trends, and instances of interpretation throughout the course of the Bible's reception, which itself includes "every single act or word of interpretation of that book (or books) over the course of three millennia."<sup>5</sup> Reception history is "a scholarly enterprise, consisting of selecting and collating shards of that infinite wealth of reception material in accordance with the particular interests of the historian concerned, and giving them a narrative frame."<sup>6</sup> Biblical reception history is a highly diverse and eclectic field, and its practitioners undertake this scholarly research for a variety of different reasons and ends.

In this essay, we will seek—in concert with the teachings of *Dei Verbum*—a deeper understanding of John's Prologue by examining it in light of its interpretation by one of its most important and consequential readers: St. Augustine. Focusing on Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel according to John* 1–3 (henceforth *Tract. Ev. Jo.*), I will attend to the ways in which Augustine develops the Prologue's unifying vision

3 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God], Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, (November 18, 1965), §23, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition, gen. eds. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1992), 763.

4 *Dei Verbum* §23, *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 763.

5 Jonathan Roberts, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, eds. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 [2011]), 1.

6 Roberts, "Introduction," 1.

of things in relation to God's Word or Wisdom.<sup>7</sup> What emerges from Augustine's interpretation is a synthetic account of "all things in Wisdom," wherein all created realities, and human beings in particular, creation and redemption, revelation and reason, the Old and New Covenants, are all inter-connected with one another by virtue of their relation to Christ, the Word and Wisdom of God.<sup>8</sup>

### I. The Divine Word

John begins the Prologue with the mystery of God: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (1:1–2). Drawing on biblical imagery for God's Word or Wisdom as being present with or involved when God creates (see Prov. 8:22–31; Wisd. 9:1–9), John's Prologue sets forth the life of God as constituted by unity and distinction: "the Word was with God" (there is distinction) and "the Word was God" (there is unity and identity) (1:1). The divine life, or "identity," is a relationship between God and his Word, or, to use the register introduced at 1:14, the Father and the Son.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his ministry, Jesus speaks of the Father as the source of his life and mission. Jesus is the Son, the one whom the Father has sent into the world for its salvation (3:16–17). Jesus' unique and eternal relationship with the Father as his only Son makes him the only one who can reveal the Father to the world (1:18; 6:44; 14:9–10). All of Jesus' words and deeds are given him to do by the Father (5:19–20; 8:38–39; 14:11), and he carries out his mission in perfect love and obedience (10:17–18). The Father gives his everything to the Son (5:24), and as is made manifest in the gift of his life on the cross, the Son in turns gives his everything back to the Father. Jesus acts with the Father's power and authority (10:30), and a response to Jesus is the same as a response to the Father who sent him (5:20–23).<sup>10</sup> Thus, when viewed in light of the Gospel narrative, these opening

7 English citations of Augustine's *Tract. Ev. Jo.* will be taken from Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009). Citations of Augustine's Latin texts will be taken from the editions in *Patrologia latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris, 1844–1864); henceforth abbreviated as PL.

8 The phrase "all things in wisdom" comes from Augustine's quotation of Ps. 103:24 in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16 (Hill 51).

9 The use of "divine identity" as a means for understanding New Testament claims about Jesus vis-à-vis the God of Israel is set forth in Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). The Fourth Gospel does not explicitly speak of the Holy Spirit as "God" as it does of the Word. However, the Fourth Gospel does speak of the Spirit as "holy" (1:33; 14:26; 20:22)—a modifier which John reserves only to the divine (the Father, in 17:11; the Son, in 6:69). Moreover, in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus speaks of the Spirit as being sent by (and thus closely related to) the Father and himself and never acting independently of them (16:13–15). In subsequent doctrinal statements and Trinitarian theology, the Holy Spirit is identified (by analogy) with the eternal love existing between the Father and the Son, and when the Prologue is read in light of subsequent Christian doctrine, the Spirit's inclusion within the Godhead could be taken as implied.

10 This identification of a response to Jesus as a response to the Father likely reflects ancient Jewish

words of the Prologue invite us to think of the relationship of God (the Father) and the Word (the Son) as turned towards each other in an infinite exchange of life and love: the divine communion.

Confronted with this glimpse into the mystery of God, Augustine opens his homiletic exposition of John's Prologue not by delving immediately into the Gospel but by putting his congregation into an appropriate context for thinking properly about God. He begins by pointing out that the members of his congregation have different capacities to understand spiritual realities. On the one hand, with reference to 1 Corinthians 2:14, Augustine states that many among his hearers are "merely natural, still of a materialist cast of mind and still not able to raise themselves to a spiritual understanding."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Augustine also acknowledges that others in his congregation are more intellectually capable of understanding both the Gospel and Augustine's interpretation. Although Augustine's hearers may differ in their abilities to understand spiritually, they will all benefit (no matter their intellectual capacities) from the Scriptural teaching by the grace of God: "Ultimately, the mercy of God will be present, so that all may be satisfied and each one will grasp what he can."<sup>12</sup>

Augustine develops this distinction between those more and less capable of spiritual understanding by interpreting it through Psalm 71:3 (*"May the mountains receive peace for your people and the hills justice"*): "Mountains are lofty souls; hills are ordinary souls."<sup>13</sup> The lofty souls (or mountains), among whom Augustine counts John the Evangelist and John the Baptist, are those who have been illumined according to their respective capacities by God's Wisdom (they "receive peace") so that they might pass on "justice" (which Augustine identifies as faith by way of Rom. 1:17) to those ordinary souls (the hills) with lesser capacities to understand.<sup>14</sup>

Part of the theological payoff of this homiletic opening is to highlight the limits of human beings for grasping spiritual realities and especially God. While Augustine acknowledges that his congregants have different capacities to understand, he speaks of any measure of spiritual understanding as a gift from God, and, in doing so, he effectively levels these differences between his congregants. Both lofty souls and ordinary souls stand in need of illumination by God and any understanding of spiritual realities comes by way of God's grace and mercy—a point

---

understandings of sender and envoy; see Peder Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 137–148; repr. in

to which I will later return. The incomprehensibility of God is, as Lewis Ayres puts it, a fundamental principle of Augustine's "Trinitarian grammar"—before the ineffable mystery of God, all people fall short of understanding and stand in need of God's assistance.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine's teaching about divine incomprehensibility informs his exegesis of John 1:1. He remarks that the opening of the Prologue treats "Christ's inexpressible divinity—and it was spoken almost inexpressibly. Who, in fact, will ever comprehend *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God?*"<sup>16</sup> Augustine calls attention to the use of the verb "to be" (given in the imperfect tense as "was") with reference to the Word in John 1:1. The use of this verb in connection with the Divine Word indicates that the Word, simply, *is*.<sup>17</sup> The Word is eternal, unchanging "Being itself [Latin: *Idipsum est*]... it is the same, ever in the same way; as it is, so it always is; it cannot change; that is what *is* means."<sup>18</sup> As such, the Word is distinct from and transcends all created realities, especially the material and changeable. Thus, Augustine speaks of John the Evangelist, a great mountain, as soaring high above creation, "above and beyond all these created things ... things that were made through the Word" so to contemplate the Divine Word.<sup>19</sup>

## II. The Creator Word

Continuing its "re-reading" of Genesis 1, the Prologue teaches that the Divine Word is the agent by which the world was created: "all things came to be through him and apart from him, not one thing came to be" (John 1:3; see also 1:10). All creation exists in relation to the Divine Word, and accordingly, as Raymond Brown writes, "the Word's role in creation means that Jesus has a claim on all."<sup>20</sup> All creation owes its existence to the Divine Word, and, consistent with the broad biblical tradition, the Prologue affirms the radical distinction between the transcendent Creator God and the created world (that is, God and everything-that-is-not-God).<sup>21</sup>

15 Lewis Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [2000]), 51–76.

16 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2 (Hill 55).

17 Ayres observes that Augustine often regards the Latin *est* ["he, she, or it is"] as a name for God. See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 201–202.

18 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2 (Hill 55–56); Latin text from PL 35:1389. On Augustine's analysis of *idipsum*, see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 200–208.

19 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.5 (Hill 42). Elsewhere, Augustine speaks of the eagle as the symbol befitting John the Evangelist because John "flies like an eagle above the clouds of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the sharpest and steadiest eyes of the heart"; quotation from Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* [*On the Agreement of the Evangelists*] 1.6.9; translated from PL 34:1047.

20 Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1.25.

21 A masterful explication of this essential doctrine for all Christian thinking is Robert Sokolowski,

John articulates the distinction by a careful use of two Greek verbs in 1:1–14. When referring to God in himself, John uses the Greek verb *eimi* (“to be”) in the imperfect tense: “the Word *was* God.” John also uses the Greek verb *ginomai* (“to become”) when articulating the “coming to be” of the created world through the Divine Word. In doing so, the Prologue resembles the Septuagint text [LXX] of Genesis 1, which uses the same Greek verb (*ginomai*) in the “Let there be ...” commands spoken by God throughout the days of creation. The dual reservation of the verbs “to be” for God and “to become” for the world continues throughout the Prologue until 1:14 when John sets forth the incarnation of the Word wherein the Divine, Creator Word becomes part of his creation: “the Word *became* flesh and tabernacled among us.”

For Augustine, a proper understanding of the Creator/creation relationship is essential for a correct understanding of the Prologue’s teachings. Augustine’s homilies raise the question of how human beings might understand these statements about God and the Word in the Prologue, given God’s radical transcendence and incomprehensibility.

Augustine frames his response by first instructing his congregation to resist thinking about the Divine Word as a thing or within the categories proper to created realities. For instance, Augustine contrasts his own words, which he is presently speaking in his sermon, with God’s Word. Augustine’s verbalizations sound out and pass away, and thus they are unlike God’s Word which is eternal. God’s Word is not like Augustine’s spoken words, and thus he rhetorically asks, “What kind of Word can it be then, that is both spoken and does not come to an end?”<sup>22</sup> To assist in appropriate thinking about God’s Word, Augustine offers the created analogy of the inner, spiritual word.<sup>23</sup> Before a person vocalizes speech, he or she first conceives an inner, immaterial word in the mind (something like an idea, intention, or meaning). A person then conveys this spiritual word to another through the medium of a spoken word. This inner word, Augustine says, “is the word which is really spoken in the spirit, that which you understand from the sound but which is not itself the sound.”<sup>24</sup> The spoken word comes to be and then passes away, but the spiritual word remains in the minds of both the speaker and the hearer.<sup>25</sup> Hence, the inner

---

*The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), espec. 12–19. For this teaching in Second Temple Judaism, see Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 8–11.

22 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.8 (Hill 45).

23 See Lewis Ayres, “Augustine on the Trinity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, eds. Gilles Emery, O.P. and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 124; Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 194–195, 290–293; Gerard Watson, “St. Augustine and the Inner Word: The Philosophical Background,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 54 (1988): 81–92.

24 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.8 (Hill 45).

25 Augustine (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.8) states: “The word that sounds out loud dies away and ceases; but what the sound signifies remains both in the thought of the speaker and in the understanding of the hearer; that is what remains when the sounds die away” (Hill 46).

word provides a limited measure of insight into how God's Word could be thought of intelligently as both spoken and enduring. And yet, while the analogy of the inner word has some merit, Augustine reminds his congregation of the limitations of all created analogies, for God's Word cannot be defined or adequately grasped in terms of created realities, including human speech.<sup>26</sup>

The reason why created analogies have even a small measure of legitimacy for talking about God is the relationship which exists between the Divine Word (Being itself) and the creation which exists through him. Augustine explicates the Creator/creation relationship in terms of God's Wisdom, a title interchangeable with God's Word, and he does so by using two similar analogies.<sup>27</sup>

First, Augustine elaborates on the analogy of the inner, spiritual word by likening it to a builder's design (Latin: *consilium*).<sup>28</sup> Just as a person conceives an inner word in the mind, so too does a builder devise a mental plan for a building to be constructed. Once the building has actually been built, Augustine says, "People notice the admirable building and admire the builder's plan; they are surprised by what they can see [that is, the building] and in love with what they do not see [that is, the builder's mental plan]."<sup>29</sup> Augustine's point is that the building is a sensible expression of the mental plan which exists in the builder's mind. By observing the material building, a person can obtain a measure of insight into the builder's mental plan.

Augustine uses this analogy of the builder to explain how human beings can obtain some insight into God on the basis of the created world. Just as a building reveals something of the mental design which exists in the builder and from which it derives its existence, so too does the created world reveal something of God's Wisdom which made it and from which it is derived. Augustine says, "Take a look at the structure of the world, observe what has been made through the Word, and then you will have some idea of what the Word is like."<sup>30</sup> God's Word/Wisdom is Being itself, and therefore everything that exists derives its existence from God. Things exist because they participate derivatively in God's Being, and this ontological participation allows for some manner of analogous speech and thought about God.

Augustine elaborates on how creation derives its existence from God's Wisdom in his exegesis of John 1:3c–4a: "*What was made in him is life.*"<sup>31</sup> Augustine

26 See *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.10 (Hill 47).

27 On these analogies, see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 193–194.

28 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.9; Latin from PL 35:1384.

29 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.9 (Hill 46).

30 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.9 (Hill 46). He later (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.9) adds, "From this structure [i.e. heaven and earth], then, think about what the Word must be like through which it was made" (Hill 47).

31 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16 (Hill 51). A critical issue in the interpretation of John's Prologue is how to punctuate 1:3b–4a—an issue which Augustine himself points out in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16.

interprets this statement in tandem with the claim of Psalm 104:24, “*You have made all things in wisdom.*”<sup>32</sup> Combining the claims of John’s Prologue and that of Psalm 104, Augustine states, “So if Christ is the Wisdom of God, and the Psalm says, *You have made all things in wisdom*, then just as all things were made through him, so all things were made in him.”<sup>33</sup> All things exist not only *through* God’s Wisdom, but also, somehow, *in* God’s Wisdom.

To explain, Augustine employs a second, related analogy: a craftsman who builds a wooden chest.<sup>34</sup> Once again, he makes a distinction between the immaterial chest, which exists in the craftsman and from which a material wooden chest is constructed. Augustine speaks of the immaterial chest existing in the craftsman’s “art” [Latin: *ars*], which “refers to the learnt and active knowledge or knowing of an artist who creates.”<sup>35</sup> The immaterial chest is that from which the material, wooden chest originates. These two chests are related in one respect, but distinct in another—for one chest exists conceptually and invisibly in the craftsman and the other chest has a derivative, sensible existence as the wooden box. For Augustine (with a certain indebtedness to Platonism), the immaterial chest has a stronger mode of existence (it is more “alive”) than the wooden chest because it is not subject to material corruption: “For the one can rot and decay, but the other one, which remains in the mind, can fashion another chest.”<sup>36</sup> In this light, Augustine says, “The chest he made is not living; but the chest in his mind is alive, because the soul of the craftsman, where all these things are before they are in fact produced, is living.”<sup>37</sup>

As the immaterial chest, which exists *in* the craftsman’s creative “art,” is a source for the life and existence of the material wooden chest, so, by analogy, can the Wisdom of God be said to contain the intelligible forms (the Life) of all things which Wisdom creates.<sup>38</sup> Augustine states, “the Wisdom of God, through whom all things were made, contains all things in the mind before she fashions them; consequently, all the things that are made through such a design are not thereby

---

The issue is whether to take the Greek phrase “what has come to be” (*ho gegonen*) as completing what comes before it in 1:3 (thus, “apart from him there came to be not one thing which has come to be”) or as leading into what follows the phrase in 1:4 (thus, “what came to be in Him was life”). Augustine chooses the latter articulation.

32 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16 (Hill 51).

33 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16 (Hill 51).

34 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.17.

35 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.17 (PL 35:1387). Quotation from Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 194 n. 60.

36 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.17 (Hill 52).

37 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.17 (Hill 52).

38 See Wayne J. Hankey, “Ratio, Reason, Rationalism,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 696–702, at 697–698.

life, but whatever has been made is alive in him.”<sup>39</sup> All created realities derive their existence and life from God’s Wisdom. In this way, Augustine develops the Prologue’s account of Creator and creation into his account wherein all things are ontologically related in that they all share a common relation to God’s Word/Wisdom, who made and contains all things: “All things came to be through him, and apart from him, not one thing came to be. What has come to be through him was life” (John 1:3–4).

### III. *The Enlightening Word*

After identifying the Divine Word as the agent of creation and source of life, John’s Prologue continues, “the life was the light of human beings” (1:4). The Fourth Gospel, as well as the First Letter of John, employs the symbolism of light in its presentation of Jesus.<sup>40</sup> More specifically, the Gospel uses light symbolism with regard to three key aspects of Jesus and his work: Jesus the revealer, Jesus the giver of eternal life, and the coming of Jesus as the occasion of judgment.

First, John uses light symbolism to present Jesus as the revealer. On two occasions, Jesus identifies himself as “the Light of the world” (8:12; 9:5). He is the one sent into the world by the Father to reveal God as Father and himself as Son and to accomplish the divine work of salvation. The pre-eminent moment of the revelation of God is at the cross, where the Father’s giving of the Son (his all) and the Son’s laying down his life out of love and obedience to the Father (his all) reveals God as an eternal exchange of radical, self-giving love (John 8:28; 1 John 4:8–10).

Second, Jesus as the light is also the giver of life. After first identifying himself as the Light of the World, Jesus adds “the one who follows me will not go about in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). As the one who reveals the Father and accomplishes his saving work, Jesus offers eternal life to those who receive him in faith and discipleship (3:16–17). The Fourth Gospel teaches that eternal life is a participation in the relationship of the Father and the Son—the divine communion—entered into by receiving a share in Jesus’ own life as the Son (and thus sharing in his relationship with the Father). At the close of his public ministry, Jesus exhorts his hearers, “believe in the Light so that you may become sons of the light” (12:36). These words recall the Prologue, which speak of an anthropological aspect of salvation: “to as many as did receive him, he gave them the power to become children of God” (1:12).

Third, John associates the coming of Jesus as the light with judgment (3:19–21). In John’s Gospel, “the world” (when used with a negative connotation)

39 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.17 (Hill 52).

40 For more on John’s use of light symbolism, see Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:515–516; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1953]), 201–205; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 123–154.

indicates human beings and their world as they are in a willful rebellion against God and his Word—hence, it has turned away from the spiritual light and into spiritual darkness.<sup>41</sup> Jesus was sent as the Light into this spiritually darkened world, and the very presence of the Light necessarily provokes a response from people. All people must make a decision whether to receive or reject Jesus and his revelation.<sup>42</sup> Those who receive him in faith are delivered from the spiritual darkness and are given the light of life (8:12; 12:35); those who knowingly and willfully refuse the Light choose to remain in the spiritual darkness.

Augustine's interpretation of the Prologue's teaching about the Word as "light" (1:4) follows closely upon his analysis of 1:3b–4a ("*what was made in him is life*") in terms of God's Wisdom.<sup>43</sup> According to Augustine, the Prologue speaks of "life" being "*in*" God's Wisdom because the intelligible forms of all things, which he creates, exist primarily in God's Wisdom. For Augustine, the Prologue's further claim, "the life was the light of human beings" (1:4b), speaks to the Wisdom of God as the source of illumination of human beings in particular.<sup>44</sup>

The claim that the Light illumines human beings in particular leads Augustine to consider what makes human beings distinct from other creatures and thus capable of being illumined. After ruling out qualities such as strength, speed, and beauty, Augustine claims that human uniqueness and superiority to the animals lies in the human possession of a rational mind capable of understanding.<sup>45</sup> Augustine identifies the rational mind as that aspect of human nature where human beings bear the image of God: "the human being, *made to the image of God* (Genesis 1:27), does have a rational mind, with which wisdom may be perceived."<sup>46</sup> The rational mind seeks to be illumined by and contemplate Wisdom, which also created all things and contains their intelligible forms. In this way, Augustine explains how the Life "*in*" the Wisdom of God is also "the Light" which illumines the rational human mind, seeking understanding: "the light of human beings is the

41 Donatien Mollat thus describes "the world" as used negatively in John: "at the heart of this world, the author of the Gospel uncovers an irreducible core of resistance to God. He has the intuition of a formidable power of negation and refusal, which exceeds the limits of humanity and plunges its roots into a hidden home of hate and deception." Quoted from Donatien Mollat, "S. Jean L'Évangéliste," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, ed. Marcel Viller, S.J. et al., 17 vols. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), 8.199 [my translation].

42 This is a point classically highlighted in Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951–1955), 2.33–40.

43 Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.16 (Hill 51).

44 Augustine (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.18) says of John 1:4, "it is from life that human beings are enlightened" (Hill 53). On the complex topic of "illumination" in Augustine, see R. A. Markus, "Augustine: Reason and Illumination," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 362–373; Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 77–96; Hankey, "Ratio, Reason, Rationalism," 698–699.

45 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.18; 3.4.

46 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.18 (Hill 53).

light of minds. The light of minds is above minds and surpasses minds. That is the life through which all things were made.”<sup>47</sup>

Augustine’s interpretation of God’s Wisdom as the source of illumination for human minds gives perspective on his (previously mentioned) remarks about the different human capacities to understand spiritual realities, that is, “the mountains” and “the hills.” Augustine cites John the Evangelist as the highest of mountains, for “he was contemplating the divinity of the Word.”<sup>48</sup> These heights of contemplation were not an achievement of John himself, but rather a gift of divine grace. Like the other mountains, John was “enlightened by Wisdom herself.”<sup>49</sup> But Augustine asks how John could ascend to contemplate the ineffable Wisdom of God, which 1 Corinthians 2:9 describes as that “*which no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered in the heart of man.*”<sup>50</sup> He answers that Wisdom so entered into John’s heart such that he was ceasing to be a man and “had begun to be an angel,” that is, John became a messenger proclaiming God.<sup>51</sup> Augustine cites holiness and that which accompanies people becoming “more than human,” for “all the saints—because they are announcers of God—are angels.”<sup>52</sup> God’s Wisdom transforms John spiritually and morally by grace and elevates him to contemplate the divinity of the Word. Augustine thus praises the Evangelist for his holiness and humility, which coincide with the elevating and illuminating activity of God’s Wisdom, and so encourages his congregation: “We will become more than merely human if we acknowledge in the first place that we are in fact human, that is, so that we might rise up to that lofty height by humility.”<sup>53</sup>

The goal of such divinely worked illumination is that the one illumined (a “mountain”) should pass on what they have received to others, especially to ordinary people (“the hills”). John the Evangelist did this by passing on the fruits of his illumination through his Gospel. Referencing the scene where the Beloved Disciple leaned back upon Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper (John 13:23), Augustine says of John the Evangelist: “he laid his head on the Lord’s breast and from the Lord’s breast drank in what he would give us to drink.”<sup>54</sup> John received wisdom and illumination from the Lord, and he in turn “gave us words to drink” in his Gospel.<sup>55</sup> However, Augustine is quick to point out that both the Evangelist and the Scriptures are not

47 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.4 (Hill 71).

48 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.5 (Hill 42).

49 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.2 (Hill 40).

50 As quoted in Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.4 (Hill 41).

51 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.4 (Hill 41).

52 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.4 (Hill 41).

53 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.4 (Hill 41).

54 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.7 (Hill 44). See also Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* [On the Agreement of the Evangelists] 1.4.7.

55 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.7 (Hill 44).

luminous of their own accord but are mediators of light. As Augustine says of John the Baptist (another one of the “mountains”), “if ... he had not been enlightened, he would have been darkness.”<sup>56</sup> The mountains, like John the Evangelist and John the Baptist, are lights, but they only shine because they have been illumined by and mediate “the true Light” (John 1:9): “a person who has been enlightened is also called light, but the true light is the one who enlightens.”<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, Augustine instructs his congregation to look beyond such “mountains” and lesser “lights” to the true light (that is, God’s Word/Wisdom) who illumines them.

Augustine also maintains that such divinely inspired illumination as that granted to John the Evangelist is not the only way by which human beings can attain some insight into God’s Wisdom. Appealing to Romans 1:20–22, Augustine argues that human beings can arrive at some knowledge of the Creator by means of philosophical reflection on the created world.<sup>58</sup> The possibility of knowing something of God from creation arises from a combination of two previously mentioned factors: first, human beings possess rational minds capable of perceiving Wisdom, and second, created realities derive their existence from (and thus participate in) God’s Wisdom, Being itself. The (limited) powers of human reasoning can attain something of divine Wisdom by rational reflection on the created order which comes from and exists in the same divine Wisdom.

Augustine places this discussion of knowing something of the Creator from reasoned reflection on creation within a metaphorical description of the human condition. He likens it to a person who can see his homeland from afar and desires to reach its secure confines but is separated from it by a vast, presently uncrossable sea.<sup>59</sup> The homeland which people long for is eternal Wisdom. Some people (“The great minds of the mountains”) are able to see across the waters to view their destination, but others (the “little”) cannot.<sup>60</sup> While “the great” by philosophical reasoning may be able to recognize Wisdom as the longed-for homeland, both they and “the little” are equally unable to cross the sea on their own. Both the great and the little have the same identical means for crossing the sea: “no one can cross the sea of this world unless carried over it on the cross of Christ.”<sup>61</sup>

56 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.6 (Hill 60).

57 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.6 (Hill 59).

58 Augustine (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.4) says, “Certain philosophers in this world have sought the creator through the creature—because he can indeed be found through the creature, as the apostle clearly tells us ...” (Hill 57). For a sketch of Augustine’s account of the knowledge of God from creation, see R. A. Markus, “Augustine: Reason and Illumination,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 395–405, at 395–397.

59 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2–3.

60 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.3 (Hill 57).

61 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2 (Hill 56).

Once again, Augustine presents God's Wisdom as bringing diverse realities together. Both John the Evangelist and the philosophers are "mountains," who have as their object of contemplation God's eternal Wisdom. By placing these two "mountains" in a similar position vis-à-vis God's Wisdom, Augustine brings together revelation and reason, theological contemplation and philosophical inquiry. They are inter-connected as diverse ways in which human beings are given to know Wisdom.

But whereas Augustine praises John the Evangelist for his humility, he indicts the philosophers for their pride and sin. This brings us to Augustine's interpretation of "the darkness" (John 1:5). The Fourth Gospel teaches that the world, although created good by the Divine Word (in light of Gen. 1), has been plunged into spiritual darkness on account of its sin. The Gospel locates the core of sin in creatures' knowing and willful rebellion against God's Word, but Augustine focuses his discussion of sin in terms of pride and worldly attachments. He does so by citing three groups as examples.

First, like Paul in Romans 1:20–21, Augustine castigates the philosophers, who could see across the metaphorical waters to the destination of eternal Wisdom, but their pride prevented their crossing: "They saw where they were to go, but, being ungrateful to the one who set what they saw before them, they wanted to take all the credit for the sight themselves; and, grown thus proud, they lost what they saw and turned away from there to idols ... and disdaining the creator."<sup>62</sup> These philosophers boast in their achievements and mock the humility of the incarnate and crucified Word as the only means of reaching their goal.<sup>63</sup>

A second group, whom Augustine singles out as inhabiting the darkness, are heretics and schismatics.<sup>64</sup> These people may have the great minds of mountains, but instead of passing on "peace," they bring division and sunder the Church.

A third group whom Augustine indicts are the "lovers of the world."<sup>65</sup> In his discussion of this group, Augustine says that to love something is "to live from within [it]"—or, one might say, to seek one's happiness and fulfillment in it and thereby rest in it.<sup>66</sup> The lovers of the world are people "who put the world first in their affections; for their heart dwells in the world."<sup>67</sup> In this way, Augustine interprets the Fourth Gospel's use of "the world" with different connotations. On the one hand, the world can mean God's good creation as such, but when the

62 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.4 (Hill 58). Augustine here reads John's Prologue in light of Rom. 1:20–21.

63 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.4 (Hill 58).

64 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.3.

65 See *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.11; 3.5.

66 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.11 (Hill 63). Compare Augustine's distinction of "use" and "enjoy" in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* [On Christian Teaching], 1.3.3–1.4.4; 1.22.20–1.33.27.

67 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.11 (Hill 63).

Gospel speaks of the world as wicked, it is because of these “lovers of the world” and not on account of its creation by God.<sup>68</sup>

Human beings have withdrawn from the Light by their sins, and the sin of human beings has left them in a woeful, wounded state.<sup>69</sup> Augustine frequently describes this state of fallen humanity in terms of diseases and ailments of the eyes. Sin has left humans spiritually blind to God’s ever-present Wisdom: “just as a blind person, placed in the sun, has the sun present to him, even though he is absent from it [that is, he cannot see the sun], in the same way every [sinner] is blind in heart.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Augustine will speak of the eyes of the heart as being weakened and incapable of seeing clearly.<sup>71</sup> So, wounded and blinded, the fallen human race stands in need of a healer, and, in this way Augustine explicates the Prologue’s teaching on the economy of salvation worked by the Divine Word.

#### IV. *The Healing Word*

John’s Prologue famously speaks of the Divine Word, who created the world, as becoming incarnate: “And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (1:14). The Prologue goes on to speak of him as the source of “grace upon grace” (1:16) as well as “grace and truth” (1:17). The Incarnate Word (or Son) is the sole revealer of the Father, for only he exists from before creation “upon the Father’s heart” (1:18).

Less clear is how much of the Prologue speaks of the work of the *incarnate* Word—that is, Jesus’ life and work in the flesh—and more specifically, how 1:10–13 should be understood.<sup>72</sup> For instance, many Johannine scholars see the first mention of John the Baptist in 1:6 as indicating that all the material from 1:6–18 pertains to the work of the Word made flesh in Jesus.<sup>73</sup> Taken in this light, 1:10–13 speaks to the incarnation of the Word in Jesus and the mixed (but largely negative) response which he received from his Jewish contemporaries.

Other scholars, however, locate the discussion of the Incarnate Word only in 1:14–17<sup>74</sup> and so take 1:10–13 as speaking of the activity of the Divine Word prior to his Incarnation—that is, his presence and activity in the world generally

68 Augustine (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.5) uses the example of a “bad house” to illustrate this point: “the world is bad, because those who live in it are bad, just as a house is bad—not because of its walls, but because of its inhabitants” (Hill 72–73). See also *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.11.

69 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.7.

70 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19 (Hill 54); compare *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.5.

71 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.8.

72 The text of John 1:10–13 reads: “He was in the world, and the world came to be through him. Yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as did receive him, he gave them, to those who believe in his name, power to become children of God, those who were not born from blood, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from human will, but from God.”

73 See, for example, Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1.28–30; Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 37–39.

74 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... & etc.”

and in Israel specifically.<sup>75</sup> Support for this second interpretation comes from the Fourth Gospel's subtle affirmation of the presence of the Divine Word in the history of Israel. For example, when a heated exchange between Jesus and his opponents reaches its climax in 8:57, Jesus claims to have had a relationship with Abraham. His opponents are incredulous and ask, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus then speaks of his divine identity and that he actually existed before Abraham: "before Abraham came to be, I AM" (8:58). In another instance, the evangelist identifies the Divine Word as the one seen by the prophet Isaiah when Isaiah saw the Lord at his prophetic call (John 12:41; compare Isa. 6:1–4). Augustine's exegesis of the Prologue coheres with this second line of interpretation.

Augustine understands the economy of redemption as an overarching sequence of activity in which the Eternal Word condescends, or accommodates Himself, to human beings in order to heal the wounds of sin and draw them into eternal life.<sup>76</sup> In his exposition of the economy in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1–3, Augustine continues to show the inter-connectedness of distinct realities by virtue of their relationship to God's Word/Wisdom. To bring these inter-connections into clearer focus, I will focus this treatment of Augustine's exegesis in terms of divine agency. That is, Augustine identifies the Eternal Word as the agent who is at work in both creation and redemption, in both the biblical history of Israel and in the Incarnation. The one divine agent, who is at work in these realities, binds them all together in himself.

Consistent with longstanding Christian orthodoxy, Augustine maintains the intrinsic unity between the orders of creation and redemption. One way in which he does so is by specifically identifying the Eternal Word as both the Creator and the Savior. Some of his clearest affirmations of this identification in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1–3 appear in places where Augustine speaks polemically against Arian Christology and warns his congregation against such heretical thinking.<sup>77</sup> In the course of his anti-Arian polemic, Augustine identifies the Eternal Word as both the Creator and Redeemer (or Re-creator) of humanity: "if you were once made through the Word, you still need to be remade through the Word."<sup>78</sup> In doing this, Augustine brings to light the unity between the orders of creation and redemption, since the same divine agent (the Word) acts in each.

For Augustine, this continuity of divine agency also underlies the deep unity between the Old and New Testaments. On several occasions, Augustine speaks

75 See, for example, Martin and Wright, *Gospel of John*, chapter 1; Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John* 1.255–265; Boyarin, "Gospel of the Memra," 264–275.

76 For an overview of key aspects of Augustine's Christology, see Brian E. Daley, S.J., "The Humble Mediator: The Distinctive Elements in Saint Augustine's Christology," *Word and Spirit: A Monastic Review* 9 (1987): 100–117.

77 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.11–12.

78 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.12 (Hill 48).

of the presence and activity of the Eternal Word in Old Testament events. As we have seen, Augustine interprets the use of the verb “to be” in John 1:1 (“In the beginning *was* the Word”) to indicate that the Divine Word is “Being itself,” eternal and unchanging.<sup>79</sup> Augustine then associates the Word as “Being itself” with the revelation of God’s sacred name to Moses in Exodus 3:14: “That is the name he declared to his servant Moses: *I am who am*; and *He who is sent me* (Exod. 3:14).”<sup>80</sup> Significant here is that Augustine identifies the one who appeared and spoke to Moses in Exodus 3 as the Eternal Word.<sup>81</sup>

Augustine’s identification of the saving actions of God in the Old Testament as actions of the Eternal Word continue in his remarks about the election of Israel. Augustine interprets the reference to “his own” in John 1:11 as referring to the Jews. They are the “people he made: the Jews whom, in the beginning, he made to be over all the nations.”<sup>82</sup> The Eternal Word is the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and formed them as a nation of his own. This special relationship between the Eternal Word and the people of Israel, which was forged in the covenant promises to Abraham and at Sinai, extends into the Word’s incarnation in Jesus the Jew. Augustine states, “[the Jewish] people were born of the seed of Abraham, and they are supremely his own, because they are related to him through the flesh which he was good enough to take to himself.”<sup>83</sup>

Augustine also speaks of the Eternal Word as the one who gave Israel “the law through Moses” and also became incarnate in Jesus to give “grace and truth” (John 1:17).<sup>84</sup> Augustine draws out the interrelationship between the Torah and the incarnation (and thus the Old and New Covenants) by speaking of them as both having roles in the Word’s activity to heal a spiritually blind, wounded humanity. In *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.14, Augustine introduces the example of a sick person, who does not think that he is sick and thus does not desire a cure. Redolent of Paul’s characterization of the Law as a “pedagogue” (Gal. 3:24–25), Augustine interprets the Law as a slave or nurse who assists and prepares for the doctor’s arrival. He states, “a doctor who wants to cure someone first sends along his slave so that the doctor might find the patient bandaged up.”<sup>85</sup> Continuing his Pauline-inspired reading of John’s Prologue, Augustine speaks of the Law as this nurse-slave, who bandaged up (that is, bound) the patient by laying bare his guilt and weakness but who also could not cure the patient of the illness of sin, inherited from Adam.<sup>86</sup> It

79 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2 (Hill 55).

80 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.2 (Hill 56).

81 Compare Augustine, *De trinitate* [*On the Trinity*] 2.5.23.

82 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.12 (Hill 64).

83 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.12 (Hill 64).

84 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.2, 17.

85 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.14 (Hill 78–79).

86 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.2, 11–12, 14.

is the work of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” whom Augustine says “is our one and only doctor,” to heal a wounded and spiritually blinded humanity.<sup>87</sup>

Augustine speaks of the incarnation of the Divine Word in Jesus as medicine or healing for fallen humanity.<sup>88</sup> He pays special attention to the healing role of the Incarnate Word’s humanity and humility.<sup>89</sup> Augustine spoke of the woundedness of fallen humanity as caused by and exemplified in sinners’ misguided love for worldly realities (that is, the “lovers of the world”). These misguided loves for worldly things leave sinful humanity spiritually blinded to their true homeland in God’s Wisdom: “The soul ... had become fleshly-minded by giving its consent to fleshly-minded inclinations, and that is how the eye of the heart had been blinded.”<sup>90</sup> Correspondingly, the Eternal Word became “flesh” (that is, he came to exist in a material way as a man) in order to deliver human beings from their love for and attachment to “the flesh” (that is, material things). Augustine states that the Word “became a medicine for us, so that as we had been blinded by the earth we might be healed by the earth.”<sup>91</sup>

Augustine cites the humility of the Eternal Word in condescending to take flesh and then to embrace the humiliation of the cross as an antidote to human pride and arrogance. Within the context of his metaphor of the vast sea, which separates people from their homeland, Augustine says the following: “why was he crucified? Because you were in need of the wood of his humility. You had swollen up with pride ... and you have no means of crossing over to the home country, unless you are carried there on the wood [of the cross].”<sup>92</sup> The incarnation of the Word in the man Jesus means that to perceive God’s Wisdom, one must humble oneself and look towards the humble flesh of Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

After stating that “the Word became flesh,” John’s Prologue adds “and we saw his glory” (1:14). Augustine capitalizes on this association between the Word becoming flesh and people being given to see the divine glory. According to Augustine, the Incarnate Word heals the blinded eyes of the heart in order that they might be able to see (that is, contemplate) God. He says of the Incarnate Word, “by his very birth he made an ointment with which the eyes of our hearts could be cleaned that we might see his majesty through his humility.”<sup>94</sup> The humility of God’s Word/

87 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.3 (Hill 70).

88 So too Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* [On Christian Teaching] 1.12.12–1.14.13.

89 See John C. Cavadini, “Pride,” in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 679–684, at 682–683.

90 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.16 (Hill 67).

91 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.6 (Hill 73).

92 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.4 (Hill 58).

93 Robert E. Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 287–314, at 287–288.

94 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.16 (Hill 66).

Wisdom serves to heal a fallen, prideful humanity, whose spiritual vision has been impaired, so they might be elevated to contemplate God.

Augustine follows the Prologue's sequence by associating the two following statements—"from his fullness we have all received grace for grace" (1:16) and "grace and truth have come about through Jesus Christ" (1:17)—as further descriptions of the Incarnate Word's saving work.<sup>95</sup> Augustine takes "grace for grace" as signifying two distinct but related gifts of the Incarnate Word. The first "grace" is faith and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>96</sup> Augustine arrives at this interpretation by reading John 1:17 through Romans and Paul's exposition of the grace of justification. This first grace of the remission of sins is the precondition for the second "grace" which is the gift of eternal life.<sup>97</sup>

Elsewhere in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1–3, Augustine speaks of the same sequence of gifts (forgiveness and then eternal life) and makes clear that eternal life is the grace of divine adoption. Commenting on John 1:12, Augustine states, "the only-begotten Son came to forgive sins, those sins which had us so tied up that they were an impediment to his adopting us; he forgave those he wished to make his brothers and sisters and made them co-heirs."<sup>98</sup> The Eternal Word, therefore, is the source of both mercy and of eternal life. The coming of the Word as a human being in Jesus gives confirmation that human beings can in fact become God's adopted children.<sup>99</sup>

Augustine links these two "graces" (mercy and eternal life) in 1:16 to the "grace and truth" that came through Jesus (1:17). The singular mention of "grace" in 1:17 summarizes the two "graces" spoken of in 1:16. The "truth" in 1:17 names the faithfulness of the Divine Word, who fulfilled the promises spoken through the prophets. Augustine thus says, "God had promised [mercy] through the prophets; and when he came to give what he had promised, he gave not only grace, but truth as well. How was truth demonstrated? Because he did what was promised."<sup>100</sup> Through his interpretation of the Incarnate Word's "grace and truth," Augustine unites the Old and New Covenants in the person of the Divine Word. What the Divine Word promised through the prophets in the Old Testament, he accomplished in the New by taking flesh in Jesus.

## V. Conclusion

From its opening presentation of the pre-existent relationship of God and the Word, the Prologue of the Gospel according to John sets forth a comprehensive vision of

95 Scripture quotations taken from *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.8 (Hill 74) and 3.16 (Hill 79) respectively.

96 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.8–9.

97 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.9.

98 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.13 (Hill 64).

99 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 2.15; 3.6.

100 *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.8 (Hill 75); see *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.13.

all things in relation to the Divine Word. Augustine develops this comprehensive vision through a complex exegesis of John's Prologue. In these homilies, Augustine articulates the inter-relationships between Creator and creation, all human beings as both bearing the image of God and in need of divine healing, between revelation and reason, creation and redemption, and the Old and New Covenants. All of these diverse realities are deeply inter-related with each other because they are all related to one common subject: God's Eternal Word. Augustine's exegesis of John's Prologue is truly an account of "all things in wisdom."

How, in light of *Dei Verbum* §23, might we think of Augustine's exegesis as helping us to arrive at "a more profound understanding" of John's Prologue? Francis Martin makes a key distinction between two related aspects of biblical interpretation: "what the text *says*" and "what the texts are *talking about*."<sup>101</sup> The biblical texts are the divinely inspired points of access by which readers encounter the realities about which the texts speak. But there are more to these realities than their verbal articulations in the Bible, and thus these realities can be understood as transcending (but not denying) their historically and linguistically particular presentations in the biblical texts.

Taken in this light, Augustine attends carefully to the plain sense of John's Gospel ("what the text says"), even though he is not concerned to explicate the Prologue in its context of origins like a modern historical-critical exegete. Compared with most modern exegetes, Augustine operates with a different understanding of what constitutes the literal sense of Scripture. Augustine's larger concern lies with an intellectual exploration of "what the text is about" (its reality, or *res*).

For Augustine, the ultimate goal of proper biblical interpretation is the contemplation of eternal Wisdom, such as that passed on by John the Evangelist in his Gospel, rather than the valuable, but limited, knowledge of history and philology.<sup>102</sup> It is the reality given in the text, not the text proper, which is the ultimate object of biblical interpretation. Therefore, Augustine can bring his theological intelligence to consider the biblical *res* in ways that transcend, but do not deny, what the text may say. For in contemplating the realities given in Scripture, we encounter God's Word and Wisdom, who heals the eyes of the heart, breaks down arrogant pride, and illumines the mind to contemplate his eternal glory.

101 Francis Martin, "Mary in Sacred Scripture: An Ecumenical Reflection," *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 525–569, here 561.

102 Augustine makes the distinction between knowledge (which is concerned with historical and temporal things and is ordered to action) and wisdom (which is concerned with eternal things and is ordered to contemplation) in *De trinitate* [*On the Trinity*] 12.4.22–25; 13.1.1–4.