

Exercise 9.1

The extracts from Hamman and Comby contain much that is challenging. The auditory hallucinations of “take, read” (Hamman, 103) are striking enough but come at a time of deep sorrow and self questioning at a point where Augustine is prey to the workings of the spirit and he finds meaning for it in the lives of the saints he knows.

The necessity for humility: “Man is a puny part of your creation,” (Hamman, 104) is explained in the Preamble to the City of God (Hamman, 108) where the virtue of humility to deflate the proud allows the work of grace.

There is a suggestion in the Confessions (Hamman 104) that God can be known in the action of seeking and praising. That is still describing a mystery and contrasts with what seems the greater humility of the via negativa of pseudo-Dionysius.

I may have to forgive Augustine for blazing the trail for predestination as a concept (Hamman 105) with the delightful passage quoted from a sermon (Hamman 108) with the thrilling exhortation to risk love and give of yourself and his exhortation to joyfulness in catechesis. (Comby 113) I hadn’t thought of Augustine in this way before, as my previous studies of him had been Augustine vs the Donatists/Pelagians/those blaming Christianity for Alaric’s sack of Rome. Certainly Pelagius is more congenial to a perspective that values the individual and finds the concept of original sin and predestination, especially as it was hardened in the reformed tradition, a limiting way to think of God that attempted to codify what is truly a mystery.