

Augustine’s View of Justification and the Faith That Heals

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Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia has no entry entitled “Justification.”¹ This void, in an otherwise thorough work, draws attention to the tension that still exists between Catholics and Protestants with respect to the doctrine of justification. Many from these two groups root their theology in Augustine. This essay contributes a missing piece to current Protestant discussions on Augustine’s view of justification, one that does not extensively integrate his sanative theology with this doctrine (e.g., work by Alister McGrath and David Wright). The Augustinian view of justification presented below—a justification that heals, one that is an event and a process—contrasts with a typical reformational understanding of it. The latter emphasizes a forensic declaration by God that confers upon the believer by the imputation of Christ a new and permanent status of righteousness.

Key Words: Augustine, justification, sanative theology, spiritual formation

The thesis defended here is that Augustine understood justification as ontological and sanative, an event and a process where “to justify” meant “to make righteous.”² Four sections defend this thesis. Section one, “Current Perspectives,” summarizes three recent views of Augustine’s doctrine of justification. This section places this essayist’s thesis within contemporary discussions on Augustine’s doctrine of justification by Alister McGrath, Dongsun Cho, and David Wright. It also makes two points: (a) None of these theologians expound Augustine’s doctrine of justification as it relates to his sanative theology. (b) If this thesis is correct, McGrath’s and Wright’s interpretation of Augustine’s view of justification is bolstered and Cho’s is disputed. Section two, “The Spirit and the Letter,” presents an Augustinian view of justification found in a treatise whose historical reception has been central to the Christian tradition. This section identifies an aspect of Augustine’s doctrine of justification that is central to the above thesis—namely, a justification that heals. Section

¹ Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

² The word sanative is derived from the Latin *sanitas*, “health” and *sano*, “I heal.”

three, “Further Illustrations,” presents this sanative aspect of justification in other parts of Augustine’s works. These examples witness that Augustine held a sanative, ontological view of justification throughout his ministerial career. Section four, “An Objection,” addresses a central concern to the aforementioned thesis by way of various Augustinian prooftexts. These texts, it is argued by some, support the idea that Augustine did not understand justification as a process that actually makes the ungodly godly. This argument is refuted in section four.

Current Perspectives

The works of McGrath, Cho, and Wright helpfully set the thesis of this essay within current deliberations on Augustine’s doctrine of justification. A summary of their applicable thoughts now follows.

In *Iustitia Dei*, McGrath defines Augustine’s doctrine of justification in order to “relate [this term’s] subsequent influence upon the medieval period and beyond.”³ This book traces the history of the Christian doctrine of *iustitia Dei* (“righteousness/justice of God”; cf. Rom 1:17). Resultantly, he primarily defines Augustine’s view of justification in order to discuss its relevance to the time period of the Reformation and the modern period. This allows McGrath to examine the historical acceptance and rejection of Augustine’s doctrine of justification. This examination includes a discussion of Augustine’s emphasis of the “love of God” (*amor Dei*) versus the Reformer’s emphasis on “faith alone” (*sola fide*).⁴

During this process, McGrath makes two significant, defining statements with respect to Augustine’s doctrine of justification:

- (1) There is no hint in Augustine of any notion of justification purely in terms of “reputing as righteous” or “treating as righteous”, as if this state of affairs could come into being without the moral or spiritual transformation of humanity through grace. The pervasive trajectory of Augustine’s thought is unambiguous: justification is a causative process . . . which includes both the *event* of justification (brought about by operative grace) and the *process* of justification (brought about by cooperative grace). Augustine himself does not, in fact, see any need to distinguish between these

³ Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38. For a similar work as McGrath’s, see James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1867).

⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 41–48.

two aspects of justification.⁵

McGrath recognizes a forensic aspect to Augustine's doctrine of justification, but it also concerns the "spiritual transformation of humanity." Within this framework of thought for justification, McGrath understands that, for Augustine, "what later became the Reformation concept of 'sanctification' is effectively subsumed under the aegis of justification."⁶ This dual aspect of justification allowed Augustine to view justification as both an event and a process.

(2) McGrath further states,

For Augustine, it is love, rather than faith, which is the power which brings about the conversion of people. Just as *cupiditas* ["greed"] is the root of all evil, so *caritas* ["love"] is the root of all good. Personal union of individuals with the Godhead, which forms the basis of their justification, is brought about by love, and not by faith.⁷

This, however, does not mean Augustine does not value a key term of the Reformation—namely, *sola fide*. For he acknowledges that summarizing Augustine's doctrine by either *sola fide iustificamur* ("justification by faith alone") or *sola caritat iustificamus* ("justification by love alone") is understandable. If he is forced to choose between these two phrases, he would pick the latter.⁸

In 1986, McGrath noted "a virtual absence of studies dealing with [Augustine's] doctrine of *justification*."⁹ Subsequently, a plethora of essays, but no monographs, have been written on this topic.¹⁰ The key thoughts

⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47 (emphasis original); see also p. 49.

⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 49.

⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46.

⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46.

⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 38–54.

¹⁰ E.g., Gerald Hiestand, "Augustine and the Justification Debates: Did Calvin Step Too Far in the Right Direction?" (Moody Bible Institute, 2000); Martin W. Hedman, "Augustine on Justification: Made Righteous or Declared Righteous?" (presented at the Far West Region Annual Meeting of the ETS, Sun Valley, CA: Evangelical Theological Studies, 2003), 1–19; Matthew Heckel, "Is R. C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther? An Analysis of R. C. Sproul's Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification with Respect to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Catholic Luther Scholarship," *JETS* 47.1 (2004): 89–120; Gerald Hiestand, "Augustine and the Justification Debates: Appropriating Augustine's Doctrine of Culpability," *TJ* 28.28 (2007): 115–39; Michael M. Ramos, "In Between St. Augustine and Luther: Grace and Justification," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 2.6 (2014): 34–39.

from these works are captured by Cho's "Divine Acceptance of Sinners: Augustine's Doctrine of Justification" and Wright's "Justification in Augustine."¹¹ Both of these men launch their essays from and interact with McGrath's work on this topic.¹²

Cho argues that Augustine "taught *sola fide*, declarative justification, and the divine acceptance of sinners based on faith alone although he presented these pre-Reformational thoughts with a strong emphasis on the necessity of growth in holiness (sanctification)."¹³ Within this framework of thought, Cho claims that though Augustine perhaps emphasized the "indissoluble and simultaneous relationship between justification and sanctification," he initially did so to combat antinomian abusers. Then, against the Pelagians, Augustine used ". . . the same terminologies in a way that he could preserve the same degree of gratuitousness of grace in gradual growth in righteousness as in instantaneous justification."¹⁴ Cho also observes that, in contrast to Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, Augustine's "explicit categorical distinction, not separation, between justification and sanctification" was later defended by reformer Martin Bucer.¹⁵ He also notes that Augustine understood justification in a twofold way, that is, as an imputed righteousness and "the newness of life within believers or the image of God assisted by the Holy Spirit who helps them participate in the holy God."¹⁶

However, Cho's interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of justification differs from McGrath's. Though Cho understands Augustine to teach that Christians have "some real righteousness within themselves simultaneously when they are justified. The inherent righteousness of justifica-

¹¹ David Wright, "Justification in Augustine," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 55–72; Dongsun Cho, "Divine Acceptance of Sinners: Augustine's Doctrine of Justification," *PeC* 12.2 (2014): 163–84. David Wright states, "the fullest and best [English] treatment" of Augustine's justification is Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957). Wright, "Justification," 69n51.

¹² See, e.g., Wright, "Justification," 55, 63, 66–67, 69; Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164, 168, 172, 175, 179.

¹³ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 163.

¹⁴ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

¹⁵ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164.

¹⁶ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 164, 180–81.

tion refers to the initial sanctification that occurs at the moment of forgiveness.¹⁷ To be clear, and perhaps with the intent of keeping Augustine's view in line with what became an accepted Reformed view of justification, Cho states Augustine's justification is "not a process but an event," as it is "not to be equated with the growth of righteousness in us." For "the sole ground" of Augustine's "divine acceptance is declarative or imputed righteousness by faith in justification."¹⁸ Therefore, in Cho's view, Augustine gave an initial but not ongoing ontological sense to justification.

Wright agrees with McGrath and Cho that there is much agreement between Augustine and the Reformers. For Augustine "unmistakably preserved the distinction between faith as a free grace-gift of God and the fruitful life of good works to which it must give rise."¹⁹ And, he understood salvation as a gift of grace (1 Cor 4:7) that is "safeguarded" by divine election and a faith that receives the unmerited gift of justification.²⁰

Three key thoughts set apart Wright's essay from McGrath's and Cho's: (1) Wright's essay is primarily concerned with defining *justifico* ("I justify"), *justitia* ("justification"), and faith's role in the reception of justification. Toward this end, his essay ends with a plea. Augustinian translators should interpret *justifico* and *justitia* "not by 'justify, justification' but by terms that obviously express the ongoing change by which the ungodly become godly."²¹

(2) Wright (so also McGrath and Cho) understands an event aspect of Augustine's view of justification that is both declarative and accomplished in Christ. However, Wright also states,

Augustine in fact teaches something close to a declarative justification by faith, perhaps even faith alone, but does so as part of a more comprehensive righteous-making that embraces what most evangelicalism has called sanctification and that hence necessitates faith effectively operative through love and hope. The key to understanding this is to fasten on *justification as both event and process*, as both beginning and growth.²²

This view is in contrast to Cho's but in agreement with McGrath's.

¹⁷ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

¹⁸ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

¹⁹ Wright, "Justification," 66.

²⁰ Wright, "Justification," 71.

²¹ Wright, "Justification," 72.

²² Wright, "Justification," 70 (emphasis added); see also 62–63, 72.

Wright, it appears, understands Augustine's justification to be an event and a process that identifies with "to make righteous."

(3) Wright states, Augustine's justification displays a "fair balance" between *sola fides iustificamur* ("we are justified by faith alone") and *sola caritate iustificamur* ("we are justified by love alone"); as such, he mediates McGrath's and Cho's rival views on the role of faith and love in God's justifying act.²³

To summarize the above thoughts of this section: Neither McGrath, Cho, nor Wright deny a forensic element in Augustine's doctrine of justification. Further, McGrath, Cho, and Wright agree that Augustine consistently gave an ontological aspect to this doctrine; throughout his works he understood it to mean "to make righteous." McGrath and Wright understand Augustine's view of justification as describing an event and a process that means "to make righteous." Their position in this matter is within the majority opinion held by Augustinian scholars. According to Willem Van Asselt, this understanding of Augustine's doctrine of justification, which stresses "the actualization or 'ontological' change in the person who is justified," is still held by modern Roman Catholic theologians.²⁴ Cho accepts that Augustine understood the event of justification in terms "newness of life" and "some real righteousness." However, in contrast to McGrath and Wright, Cho argues that Augustine's view of justification is "not a process but an event."²⁵ His portrayal of Augustine's doctrine of justification, therefore, fits more closely with the view of justification held by the majority of contemporary Protestants.

The defense below has implications to these views presented by McGrath, Cho, and Wright. None of them elaborate on Augustine's doctrine of justification with respect to his soteriological theology.²⁶ If the thesis

²³ Wright, "Justification," 63, 66. For Oliver O'Donovan, "The core of [Augustine's] doctrine of justification is not expressed in the tag 'by faith' (important as that might be) but in the *solus Christus*, 'that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21)." Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, rev. ed. (Leicester: Eerdmans, 1994), 255.

²⁴ Willem Van Asselt, "Justification," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1246–54.

²⁵ Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 181.

²⁶ McGrath alludes to this connection but never develops it. He states in passing, "The free will is not lost, nor is it non-existent; it is merely incapacitated, and may be healed by grace. In justification, the *liberum arbitrium captivatum* becomes the *liberum arbitrium liberatum* by the action of this healing grace." McGrath, *Iustitia*

by this essayist is properly defended, the thoughts of this essay bolster the view that both McGrath and Wright share with respect to Augustine's doctrine of justification—namely, Augustine understood justification as an event and a process that means “to make righteous.” It also challenges Cho's claim that this is not the case. And, it suggests that in Cho's case, presentism may have led him to an anachronistic view of Augustine's doctrine of justification.

A thought by Wright now moves the argument of this essay forward to an influential treatise of Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* (henceforth *SL*). Wright states, “Augustine never addressed the topic of justification in a precise and focused way in any of his works and certainly never devoted a treatise or a sermon or a letter, and barely even a whole chapter or section of one of these, to it.”²⁷ Additionally, with respect to *The Spirit and the Letter* (AD 412), he states, Augustine “interpreted *iustifico* [‘I justify’] . . . en passant [‘in passing’].”²⁸ Given what follows, this essayist is not sure Augustine would agree with Wright's use of “en passant.” Regardless, Augustine offers enough material within his extant literature for the defense of the above thesis, of which *SL* is an excellent starting point.

The Spirit and the Letter

This section begins to elaborate upon Augustine's view of justification. In AD 427, Augustine states, “In [*SL*], I fiercely argued . . . [about] the grace of God by which the sinner is justified.”²⁹ Additionally, he ends a section of this work (i.e., *SL* 4.6–12.20) with a reminder of his intent:

Nor have we undertaken a commentary on this letter [i.e., Romans] in this work; rather, we are striving, as best we can, to show, especially by testimony from it, that we are helped by God to act with righteousness, not insofar as God gave us a law full of good and

Dei, 42. So also William Van Asselt who states, “[T]hus, justification of the sinner is not primarily a declaratory-forensic act of God but rather an infusion of charity (*inspiration dilectionis*), a healing activity of God.” Van Asselt, “Justification,” 1247.

²⁷ Wright, “Justification,” 55.

²⁸ Wright, “Justification,” 56.

²⁹ Augustine, *Retractions* 2.37 (WSAT¹ 2:144). For the last twenty years of Augustine's life, *SL* became his key tool against Pelagius, the latter of whom insisted that strict morality, attainable by free will and observance of the Law, is the condition for salvation. See also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 340–77). New City Press has published Augustine's works in a series entitled *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. This series is abbreviated in this essay as WSAT.

holy commandments, but insofar as our own will, without which we can do nothing good, is raised up through the gift of the Spirit of grace. Without this help that teaching is the letter that kills, because it holds persons guilty of transgression rather than justifies the sinner.³⁰

Augustine here confesses that he very much strove in *SL* to elaborate on the theme of justification. Further, he concludes *SL* with an admission: “This long discussion” is about whether a person can be “without sin” and have “perfect righteousness in this life,”³¹ concepts that are integral to Augustine's view of justification. In this treatise and against Pelagius's view of justification, Augustine argues that people are not able by themselves to achieve righteousness or advance in it.³² As such, it appears (contra Wright), Augustine does at least attempt to address “the topic of justification” in more than an incidental way (i.e., Wright's “en passant”). In fact, *SL* contains several units that mainly discuss justification. They are *SL* 8.14–9.15; 13.21–22; 26.45; 27.48–30:52. The first and last units of thought on this list are now discussed by way of the following two subsections. A following third subsection explains the basis for Augustine's view of justification presented in this section.

The Spirit and the Letter 8.14–9.15

The first sentence of *SL* 8.14–9.15 sets its tone. By it, Augustine refutes a Pelagian thought that placed the will of a person as central to salvation. Augustine states, “but we also praise God as the source of our justification inasmuch as he gave the law so that by considering it, we know how we ought to live.”³³ The essence of Augustine's answer of what it means to understand that “God is the source of our justification” follows.

[Paul] said: *But now the righteousness of God* . . . (Rom 3:21). . . . This is the righteousness that those who want to establish their own do not know. . . . He said: *The righteousness of God* . . . which he clothes a human being when he justifies a sinner. . . . Human beings are

³⁰ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 12.20 (WSAT¹ 23:156). Augustine here testifies that this act that “justifies the sinner” helps him or her “act with righteousness”—a concept elaborated below.

³¹ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 35.62–36.64 (WSAT¹ 23:185–87); Augustine, *Retractions* 2.37 (WSAT¹ 2:144).

³² Roland J. Teske, “Introduction to The Spirit and the Letter,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* 1:23 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), 136.

³³ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 8.14 (WSAT¹ 23:151).

justified by the gift of God through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. . . . *But the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ* (Rom 3:22) . . . is not the . . . righteousness by which God is righteous. . . . God bestows this righteousness upon the believer by the Spirit of grace without the help of the law. . . . God shows human beings their weakness through the law in order that they may take refuge in his mercy through faith and be healed. . . . For what do they have that they have not received [cf. 1 Cor 4:7]? . . . [Christians] *have been gratuitously justified by his grace* (Rom 3:24). They were not, then, justified by the law; they were not justified by their own will, but *gratuitously justified by his grace*. . . . The law shows that our will is weak so that grace may heal our will and so that a healthy will may fulfill the law, without being subject to the law or in need of the law.³⁴

That Augustine emphasizes “God as the source of a person’s justification” should not surprise anyone, for Augustine consistently builds his theology around 1 Cor 4:7.³⁵ However, to read in the above quote “clothes a human being” and settle on the idea that Augustine only believed in a forensic, imputational view of justification is to miss Augustine’s full thought on this topic. By the above quote, Augustine also provides a foundational thought for the defense of the above thesis—namely, God’s gracious act of justification heals the will of a Christian by the Spirit such that the healthy will is capable of fulfilling God’s law. How this is possible is now further explored by an examination of *SL* 27.48–30.52.

The Spirit and the Letter 27.48–30.52

Section 27.48–30.52 of *SL* is understood within the flow of this treatise as follows:³⁶ By way of *SL* 4.6–25.42, Augustine presents the treatise’s

³⁴ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 9.15 (WSAT¹ 23:152; emphasis original; underlining added). This quote resides within a unit of thought (i.e., *SL* 4.6–12.20). In this section, Augustine explains what Paul means when he states, “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).

³⁵ An electronic search of New City Press’s forty-three volumes of WSAT for 1 Cor 4:7 produces 147 hits in thirty-five volumes. Paul states in 1 Cor 4:7, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (NIV 1984).

³⁶ The following argument adopts the perspective of *SL* as presented by Teske, “Introduction to The Spirit and the Letter.”

main argument. Subsequent to this section, he then addresses two anticipated objections to his argument. The first objection is attended to in *SL* 26.43–29.51.³⁷ Augustine concludes this section with thoughts that focus on justification. These views are found in *SL* 27.48–29.51. A following transition paragraph (i.e., *SL* 30.52) allows his first answer to flow into his explanation of and answer to the expected second objection (*SL* 30.52–34.60).

Four statements adequately summarize the applicable thoughts of *SL* 27.48–30.52. (A) This section’s first sentence announces that it will address “those whom the grace of Christ justifies.”³⁸ (B) For the justified, “the heart is effected by renovation” and “renewed by grace.”³⁹ (C) That is, “the very image of God, . . . is renewed in the mind of those who believe . . . the law of God . . . is surely written in the soul, *when it is renewed by grace . . . this writing of the law upon hearts, which is justification.*”⁴⁰

(D) By winning favor through faith with the one who justifies, [Christians] attain righteousness, observe it, and live in it. . . . But justification is obtained through faith. . . . We are righteous to the extent that we are saved. . . . By faith, then, in Jesus Christ we obtain salvation both to the slight extent that its reality has begun for us and to the extent that we await its perfection with hope. . . . Let the soul take refuge through faith in the mercy of God so that he may give what he commands. By the inspiration of the sweetness of grace . . . he will make what he commands more delightful.⁴¹

By these four statements Augustine identifies justification with “the writing of the law” upon the Christian heart. He declares that a Christian lives “in it,” such that justification is observable and ongoing. By this act of justification, God makes what “he commands more delightful.”

The above two subsections note a sanative aspect to Augustine’s view

³⁷ In this section and by way of Rom 2:14–15, Augustine primarily discusses the renewal of nature by way of the “law written on a Christian’s heart.” Augustine did not understand Rom 2:14–15 as a reference to non-Christians who because of natural law do what the law requires. Rather, he understood Paul to reference here gentile Christians.

³⁸ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (WSAT¹ 23:173).

³⁹ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (NPNF¹ 5:103; WSAT¹ 23:174).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.48 (WSAT¹ 23:174; emphasis added).

⁴¹ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 29.51 (WSAT¹ 23:176–77). For similar thoughts as presented by these five points, see *The Spirit and the Letter* 12.19; 14.24; 26.44, 45; 28.49; 29.50 (WSAT¹ 23:155, 159, 170–71, 171–72, 174–75, 175–76).

of justification. This ongoing act of God heals the will and enables a believer to embrace the lifestyle God desires. This view of justification is rooted in an important biblical verse for *SL* in particular, and for Augustine's extant works in general—namely, Rom 5:5.⁴²

Romans 5:5

With respect to Rom 5:5 Augustine states in *SL*, “The law by which [Christians] are justified was given inwardly. . . . This love is not written on stone tablets, but *has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). The law of God, then, is love.”⁴³ This “new condition of the Spirit . . . heals the new human being from the wound of the old condition. . . . He says, . . . *I will write my laws upon their minds* (Jer 31:33).”⁴⁴ For Augustine, by a divine gift there is a “change of affections [*affectuum*],” and the “will” (*velle*) of a Christian is granted the “ability” (*posse*) to love God affectionately and their neighbor efficaciously.⁴⁵ Why? God’s “love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5) enables the Christian to “embrace the righteousness of the law with an interior love” that comes by the “infusion of the Spirit of grace” (*infuso spiritu gratiae*).⁴⁶ In this regard he states elsewhere in *SL*, “Faith obtains the grace by which we fulfill the law. . . . Grace heals the will by which we freely

⁴² Romans 5:5 and Gal 5:6 are central to both Augustine’s theology and to *The Spirit and the Letter*. *The Spirit and the Letter* follows this trend, referencing Rom 5:5 more than any other verse (i.e., fourteen times), which exactly doubles the usage of 2 Cor 3:6. Cf. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 3.5; 4.6; 5.7; 14.25; 16.28; 17.29; 21.36; 25.42; 26.46; 28.49; 32.56; 33.57; 33.59 (WSAT¹ 23:146, 147, 160, 161, 162, 166, 170, 173, 175, 181, 182, 184).

An electronic search of New City Press’s forty-three volumes of WSAT for Rom 5:5 and Gal 5:6 produces the following results: Romans 5:5 is used forty-three times in thirty-nine volumes; Gal 5:6 is used ninety-nine times in twenty-seven volumes. T. J. van Bavel believes Augustine cites Rom 5:5 most frequently in all his works. T. J. van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine’s Doctrine on Prayer* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 144. As noted above in footnote 35, Augustine quotes 1 Cor 4:7 more than any other verse (contra Van Bavel).

⁴³ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 17.29 (WSAT¹ 23:162; emphasis original).

⁴⁴ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 20.35; cf. 14.25–26; 27.48; 33.59 (WSAT¹ 23:165; cf. 23:160–61, 173–74, 183–84; emphasis original, underling added).

⁴⁵ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 31.53 (WSAT¹ 23:178–79); Augustine, *Christian Instructions* 1.17.16 (NPNF¹ 2:527); Augustine, *Sermons* 212.2 (WSAT³ 6:149).

⁴⁶ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 26.46; 36.66; cf. 8.13; 10.16 (WSAT¹ 23:172, 189; cf. 150–51, 153).

love righteousness. . . . faith says, *Heal my soul!*”⁴⁷ Augustine knows the faith that justifies as grounded in and continued by the renewing work of *caritas* (“love”) and the act of prayer. God loves a person such that this person, by the infilling love of God poured into their heart, can in turn love God and neighbor. This act of love by God “heals the will.”

This sanative aspect of Augustine’s theology is also emphasized in his other anti-Pelagian works.⁴⁸ It is likewise found in his topical treatises (e.g., *Christian Instruction*, *Confessions*, *The City of God*, *The Trinity*, and *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*) as well as his personal letters and sermons, whether from the OT or the NT.⁴⁹ Augustine consistently held to a view that God heals the Christian from the wound of the old condition such that the unjust are made just. Within this framework of a God who “heals

⁴⁷ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 30.52 (WSAT¹ 23:177–78; emphasis original, underlining added). Augustine consistently mentions in his works Psalm 41:5 (41:4): “Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.” E.g., Augustine, *Confessions* 4.3.4 (WSAT¹ 1:94); Augustine, *Sermons* 16B.1, 2; 20.1, 2, 3; 29.3; 125.2; 153.10; 254.4; 397.5; 29B (WSAT³ 1:240, 241; 2:15, 16, 17–18, 117; 4:253; 5:63; 7:152; 10:549; 11:67); Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.47; 30.52 (WSAT¹ 23:173, 178); Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 19.21; 49.57 (WSAT¹ 23:226, 245); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.16; 31.2.18; 40.6; 45.1–6; 42.7; 101.2.7; 118.11.1; 128.9 140.9, 11 (WSAT³ 15:333, 381; 16:231–32, 263, 310–15; 19:67, 387–88; 20:123–24, 309, 312); Augustine, *Contenance* 7:18 (WSAT¹ 9:204); Augustine, *Faith and Works* (WSAT¹ 8:254); Augustine, *Letters* 157.3.16 (WSAT² 3:26); Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichean* 12.9 (WSAT¹ 20:131); Augustine, *On Genesis Literally Interpreted* 11.35.48 (WSAT¹ 13:457).

⁴⁸ E.g., Augustine, *Guilt and Remission of Sins* 1.18.23; 3.4.8 (WSAT¹ 23:46, 120–21); Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 19.21; 21.23 (WSAT¹ 23:225–26, 227); Augustine, *Perfection in Human Righteousness* 21.44 (WSAT¹ 23:303–4); Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.3.9; 33.56 (WSAT¹ 24:58, 89–90); Augustine, *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.5.18; 4.10.27; 11.30; 12.34 (WSAT¹ 24:126, 207, 211, 215–16); Augustine, *Against Julian: Opus Imperfectum* 2.170; 3.138, 141, 149, 151, 153; 6.20 (WSAT¹ 25:238–39, 344–45, 345, 351, 352, 650–52).

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.10.10–14.13 (WSAT¹ 11:114–16); Augustine, *Confessions* 8.1.2, 7.17, 11.27; 10.30.42 (WSAT¹ 1:186–87, 198, 205, 264–65); Augustine, *The City of God* 14.6 (WSAT¹ 7:105–6); Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.3; 4.18.24 (WSAT¹ 5:65, 209–12); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 28.108; 31.118 (WSAT¹ 8:336, 341); Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* 2.1; 4.4; 5.5; 6.5; 8.2, 10, 13; 10.1 (WSAT³ 14:37, 67–68, 79–80, 91–92, 116–17, 124–26, 128, 145–46); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 109.3 (WSAT³ 19:263); Augustine, *Letters* 145.8 (WSAT² 2:314–15); Augustine, *Sermons* 20.1; 261.1, 3–5, 9; 365.3 (WSAT³ 2:151; 7:206, 207–9, 211; 10:349).

the will," Augustine places his doctrine of justification.

Two observations summarize this section (*viz.*, *The Spirit and the Letter*). First, in *SL* Augustine presents a sanative element of justification (i.e., spiritual health and well-being of the inner person). By doing so he tethers to his doctrine of justification a key theme in *SL* in particular and his works in general—namely, a Christian is “healed by grace.”⁵⁰ He also parallels “to justify” with “to make righteous” and describes these acts as real and observable. This view of justification describes an unmerited, ontological event and process that is accomplished by the Spirit. By it a person’s will is healed. Second, justification includes “the writing of the law upon” a Christian’s heart. By this act a Christian is both righteous before God and undergoing a renewal to the image of the Son. He or she becomes in reality what they already are by God’s righteous declaration over their lives.

If these two observations are true, they support the thesis defended in this essay: Augustine understands justification, which the Spirit accomplishes by grace through faith, as ontological and sanative—an event and a process that associates with “to make righteous.” For these observations to gain viability, this question must be answered affirmatively: “Is this above understanding of Augustine’s doctrine of justification found both in his other documents and outside his anti-Pelagian years?” Five examples both answer this inquiry favorably and explain further Augustine’s view of justification.

Further Illustrations

(1) Many theologians understand Augustine to have experienced a conversion in the garden of Milan (AD 386). When he discusses this event, he states being aware of “a sickness . . . [since] being willing was not the same as being able. . . . God changed me, for you began by healing me of the itch to justify myself.”⁵¹ He further describes this healing as “justice created in us by the act of justification.”⁵² This illustration is from

⁵⁰ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 19.34; cf. 6.9; 8.13; 9.15; 19.34; 30.52 (WSAT¹ 23:165; cf. 148, 150–51, 151–52, 164–65, 177–78).

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.36.58; cf. 37.61 (WSAT¹ 1:275; cf. 277–78). See also Henry Chadwick, “Self-Justification in Augustine’s Confessions,” *EHR* 118.479 (2003): 1161–75.

⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.15.20; cf. 10.2.2 (WSAT¹ 1:323; cf. 238); see also *Enarrations on the Psalms* 110.3; 119.5 (WSAT³ 19:287–88, 502–4); Augustine, *Letters* 194.3.6–7 (WSAT² 3:291–92). For an excellent work that defends an Augustinian

Augustine’s greatest work on salvation and spiritual formation, *Confessions* (AD 397–401); it identifies justification not only with healing a sickness but with justice (i.e., a righteous lifestyle) created in us “by the act of justification.”

How Augustine understands this creative act is perhaps described in his fourth exposition of Psalm 103 (Ps 104). In this sermon he mentions four aspects of *spiritus* (“spirit/breath”) that relate justification to the Creator, creation, sin, and new creation life.⁵³ These aspects are as follows. The Creator’s life-giving *spiritus* is withdrawn from a self-sufficient person and replaced by the *spiritus* of pride (aspects one and two). The *spiritus* of the penitent, who no longer claims to be the “author of their justification” (i.e., the poor in spirit; Matt 5:3), receives God’s *spiritus* of new creation life—namely, the Spirit of God (aspects three and four). “Having renounced their own spirit, they will have God’s Spirit.” This is because God breathes forth his Spirit upon the humble, penitent person who trembles at God’s words (Isa 66:2).

Augustine then elaborates on what he means by this exchange of a person’s spirit with God’s Spirit:

Having renounced their own spirit, they will have God’s Spirit. . . . You will breathe forth your Spirit and they will be created. You will take away their spirit and send forth your own. . . . The apostle reminds us, *We are his own handiwork, created for good works* (Eph 2:10). From God’s Spirit we have received the grace to live for righteousness, for it is he who justifies the godless [see Rom 4:5]. . . . [This is for] new men and women, who confess that their righteousness is nothing of their own but rather that they have been justified by God so that his grace may be in them.⁵⁴

Augustine here parallels the reception of God’s Spirit with justification.

To summarize the thoughts of this first example: In *Confessions*, Augustine mentions a “justice created in us by the act of justification” that heals a person’s “sickness.” In his exposition of Psalm 103, he states this act of justification as possible because of an exchange. “God’s Spirit” that

tinian view of God’s spoken word that cures the soul, see Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 17 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). Kolbert believes this view is a major theme in Augustine’s theology.

⁵³ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 103.4.13–16 (WSAT³ 19:179–81).

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 103.4.14 (WSAT³ 19:179–80; emphasis original; underlining added).

allows a person “to live for righteousness” is exchanged for a person’s spirit that is given to “pride” and self-justification. This exchange creates “new men and women,” who “have received the grace to live for righteousness.” Those so “justified by God” have “grace . . . in them.”

(2) In *Nature and Grace* (AD 413/414) Augustine writes, “God himself spiritually heals the sick and restores the dead to life, that is, justifies the sinner through the mediator between God and human beings.”⁵⁵ For “faith in the mediator . . . faith in his blood, faith in his cross, faith in his death and resurrection . . . heals us,” such that Christians “have been justified by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rom 7:25).”⁵⁶ For Augustine, this healing process happens (1) to the person “whom robbers left half-dead on the road” but is now convalescing in the inn paid for by the Samaritan; (2) by Christ who is the “kindly Samaritan,” the great physician (Matt 9:12–13).⁵⁷ Here, Augustine defines justification as “concerned about the cure, not the institution of natural functions” (*ubi de sanandis, non de instituendis naturis agitur*).⁵⁸ For the convalescing Christian, this healing of nature only fully comes about in the next life. He elaborates,

Injured and seriously wounded, he cannot rise up to the peak of righteousness . . . he is still undergoing treatment. God, then, does not command what is impossible; rather, by his commandment, he warns you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot. . . . I say, “A human being certainly is not righteous as a result of the will, if one can be by nature, but one will be able to be as a result

⁵⁵ So also Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 26.29 (WSAT¹ 23:231).

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 44.51 (WSAT¹ 23:241).

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 11.12; 43.50; 52.60 (WSAT¹ 23:221–22, 241, 245–46); cf. Augustine, *Sermons* 365.3 (WSAT³ 10:349). In similar fashion Augustine states in *JL*, “The Spirit of grace acts to restore in us the image of God, the image in which we were created in terms of our nature. . . . Because of this grace we say to God, *Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you* (Ps 41:5). . . . Once that wound has been healed, the law is written there, and they naturally do what pertains to the law. . . . Nature has been repaired through grace. . . . By that grace there is written in the renewed interior human being the righteousness that sin had removed, and this mercy came upon the human race through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 27.47; cf. 30.52 (WSAT¹ 23:173; cf. 177–78; emphasis original).

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 11.12; cf. 19.21; 21.23 (WSAT¹ 23:222; cf. 226, 227).

of medication what one cannot be because of one’s injury.”⁵⁹

Only on that Day does a Christian “rise up to the peak of righteousness.” Until then, the believer undergoes “treatment.” Until then, God’s justification continues its restoration of “the dead to life.” During this process and “as a result of medication,” God enables what one could not do “because of one’s injury.”

In *Nature and Grace*, then, aspects of both summary points of the last section are also noted, albeit with extra illumination: Augustine’s doctrine of justification is about an act that heals the human nature by way of the “kindly Samaritan.” It is an event and process that continues until “the next life.”⁶⁰ This act of the Spirit is rooted in Jesus’s blood, his cross, his resurrection. For he is the mediator. Augustine’s identification of the healing of the nature of a person with justification is equally noted in the next illustration.

(3) In AD 417, Augustine preached back-to-back sermons over two days on Rom 8:30–31.⁶¹ Both sermon 158 and sermon 159 portray someone that identifies with the convalescing Christian noted in our last example. In Sermon 158, Augustine describes this person as one who is in exile from God, on a journey, often fatigued and deprived, in danger of being robbed, unjust because of “weakness,” and led to sin “by delight” for what is sinful.⁶² This same person, but now as a Christian, is exhorted to

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 43.50 (WSAT¹ 23:241); Augustine, *Against Julian: Opus Imperfectum* 6.8 Aug. 5 (WSAT¹ 25:616).

⁶⁰ See also Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 3.3; 19.21; 21.23; 23.25; 49.57; 54.63; 54.64; 55.65; 64.76 (WSAT¹ 23:218, 225, 227, 228–29, 244, 247–48, 248–49, 249–50, 255). Augustine’s response to Julian’s *To Turbanius* (AD 422) adamantly declared what he said en passant: only Christians can do righteous works, for they alone have the new nature, the new condition; they alone have been justified. Augustine, *Against Julian* 4.3.23 (WSAT¹ 24:394); cf. Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 2.2–3.3 (WSAT¹ 23:217–18); Augustine, *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.11.24 (WSAT¹ 24:128–29); Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 25.42–27.48 (WSAT¹ 23:169–173); Augustine, *The City of God* 5.19 (WSAT¹ 6:17–73). For supportive thoughts on this point, see Simon J. Gathercole, “A Conversion of Augustine. From Natural Law to Restored Nature in Romans 2.13–16,” in *Engaging Augustine on Romans: Self, Context, and Theology in Interpretation*, ed. Daniel Patte and Eugene TeSelle (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2002), 147–72; Augustine, *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby, LCC 8 (London: SCM, 1955), 188–89.

⁶¹ Augustine, WSAT: *Sermons* III/5, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. and notes Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 114, 121, 127n1.

⁶² Augustine, *Sermons* 158.8; 159.2, 6 (WSAT³ 5:118–19, 122, 124).

“love justice as you loved iniquity,” “die to oneself, to come to God,” and “mourn what you used to be, so that you may be able to become what you are not yet.”⁶³ In Augustine’s view, how is this change possible?

Near the beginning of Sermon 158, he comments on four topics (predestination, calling, justification, and glorification); he assumes a Christian already possesses the first two items.⁶⁴ He then asks, “What about being justified? What does it mean being justified? Have we got the nerve to say we already have this third thing? And will there be any of us bold enough to say, I am just . . . I am not a sinner. . . . Do we have some [justice], but not the whole of it?”⁶⁵ Augustine continues,

We certainly do have some [justice]. Let us be grateful for what we have, so that what we don’t have may be added to it, and we don’t lose what we do have. So this third thing is already happening in us. We have been justified; but this justice can grow, as we make progress. And how can it grow . . . by receiving the forgiveness of sins in the washing of regeneration, by receiving the Holy Spirit, by making progress day by day.⁶⁶

This advice is to those “already established in the condition of justification.” Augustine extensively explains this condition as a spiritual circumcision that allows a person to delight in justice.⁶⁷ With the strongest of terms, Augustine here declares justification as by the Spirit and as an event and a process. He also connects it with the New Covenant promise of heart circumcision and renewal of the inner being.

Wright helps tie these concepts of justification together by observing, “We must extract as one strand in Augustine’s teaching on *justificatio* a declarative event that warrants a perfect passive verb.”⁶⁸ For Augustine, this means that Christians are “justified after the measure appropriate to [their] present journey in exile, . . . [Christians] are still imperfect and yet partially justified [*ex parte justificatis*].”⁶⁹ Because of the God who justifies,

⁶³ Augustine, *Sermons* 159.6, 7, 8, 9 (WSAT³ 5:124, 125, 126).

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Sermons* 158.2 (WSAT³ 5:114). According to Augustine, Sermon 158 is about justification. He states, in Sermon 159, “Yesterday, on the subject of our justification, which we receive from the Lord our God, a sermon was delivered by my ministry.” Augustine, *Sermons* 159.1 (WSAT³ 5:121).

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Sermons* 158.4 (WSAT³ 5:116).

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Sermons* 158.5 (WSAT³ 5:116–17).

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Sermons* 158.6; 158.7; 159.2–8 (WSAT³ 5:116, 117, 120n9, 122–125).

⁶⁸ Wright, “Justification,” 71.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Sermons* 159.1 (WSAT³ 5:121).

Christians who before Christ were weak and sinful can “love justice as you loved iniquity.” Again, both aspects of the summary points of the last section are also noted in Sermons 158 and 159, with a wonderful phrase that emphasizes Augustine’s view of justification as an event and a process. By God’s ongoing act of justification Christians are “able to become what you are not yet.”

(4) On the occasion of John the Baptist’s birthday and against the Donatists, Augustine preached Sermon 292. It concerned the baptizer, the baptized, and the topic of justification.⁷⁰ In this sermon he states,

It’s Christ who heals, Christ who cleanses, Christ who justifies; man doesn’t justify. What is it to justify? To make just; as to mortify is to make dead, to vivify to make alive, so to justify is to make just. . . . That, you see, is the meaning of, “I [Jesus] am the good tree; let anybody who wishes to be good fruit be born of me.” . . . Whoever believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, who makes a godly person out of the ungodly . . . his faith is counted as justice. . . . As a person is such are the actions he has. If he is good he has good actions. . . . The forgiveness of sins is accomplished in [the catechumen]. So the ungodly has been justified, good fruit has been born [in the catechumen]. . . . [Jesus] baptizes in the Holy Spirit. So it’s he that justifies.⁷¹

The assumption here is that Augustine expresses one thought by three very similar phrases: “Christ who heals, Christ who cleanses, Christ who justifies.” He then explains what this one thought means. For Augustine, justification includes the forgiveness of sins. It also means “to make just,” as in to “make alive.” This fourth illustration especially correlates Augus-

⁷⁰ Augustine preached this sermon arguably very early in his ministerial career. Augustine, WSAT: *Sermons* III/8, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. and notes Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 146n1 presents AD 399 “as the mean” date for Augustine preaching this sermon and one between the suggested dates of 393 and 405. For Augustine, baptism included the singing of Psalm 41 with its petitionary cry for healing (Ps 41:5). Baptism was understood by him to begin the start of an ongoing renewal of the heart in the catechumen that continued until that Day, an act by which a person became a part of the “single body of Christ.” Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 41.1 (WSAT³ 16:239); so also William Harmless, “Baptism,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 86, 90.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Sermons* 292.6–8 (WSAT³ 8:142–45).

tine's view of justification with water baptism. For Augustine, this baptism that Jesus accomplishes by the Spirit "makes a godly person out of the ungodly." Baptism "bears good fruit" that Augustine identifies with "good actions." It parallels Jesus's baptism of the believer "in the Holy Spirit." This Holy Spirit reconstitutes what "a person is." This view of justification fits nicely within an important concept of Augustine's view of spiritual formation. A healthy person is a well-ordered person, whose centering weight is the "love of God" made available by the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁷² Again, both aspects of the summary points of the last section are also noted in Sermon 292. As a reminder, these two aspects in abbreviated form are justification as an event and a process that heals the will and justification as "the writing of the law upon" a Christian's heart.

(5) By his propositions on Romans (AD 394), Augustine comments on a phrase found in Rom 4:5—namely, "faith is credited [*deputetur*] to righteousness." One, of course, recognizes this as a well-discussed verse during the Reformation; one that many sixteenth-century European reformers strictly identified with a forensic view of justification.⁷³ Augustine states with respect to Rom 4:5, "A man is justified that he might be just, not that he might suppose he is permitted to continue to sin."⁷⁴ This is Augustine's usual interpretation of Rom 4:5. For example, in AD 406–407 he states, "You were bad, but believed in the one *who justifies the godless* (Rom 4:5)—what does *justifies the godless* mean if not 'makes godly people out of godless ones?'"⁷⁵ Years later (AD 414), but again with reference to Rom 4:5, Augustine explains how this happens: "When the soul . . . becomes just, it becomes a participant in the life of another, in a life which is not what it is itself . . . clinging to God, it is justified by him . . . by withdrawing from him it becomes wicked."⁷⁶ By way of discussions about Rom 4:5, Augustine associates justification with "to make righteous" and in AD 414 specifically correlates this verse to a believer's lifestyle.⁷⁷ By

⁷² Augustine, *The City of God* 19.13 (WSAT¹ 7:368–370); Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9.10 (WSAT¹ 1:348). So also O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 228, 239.

⁷³ E.g., John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 158–59.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Paula Landes, Texts and Translations: Early Christian Literature Series 23.6 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 22 (9).

⁷⁵ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 3.9 (WSAT³ 12:29, 75).

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 19.11 (WSAT³ 12:30, 344).

⁷⁷ In the following examples Augustine identifies "God makes us righteous"

this fifth illustration, aspects of the first and second summary points of the last section are noted, again. Of special note, here, is Augustine's way of understanding Rom 4:5 that contrasts with how it is typically understood today within the Reformed tradition.

The above five illustrations contribute to an Augustinian understanding of justification as a healing, new creation act of God that is an event and a process—a dynamic also noted in *SL*. For Augustine, as the mind is renewed toward its *telos* ("end"), disorder becomes order. Within this dynamic, knowing, willing, and doing continue to align themselves together in oneness.⁷⁸ This can be said two ways: by an ongoing and justifying act of God, the fallen, natural order of a person wanes; by a healing and justifying act of the "kindly Samaritan," a new, just person arises. This justifying event and process allows a person to grow in his or her ability to no longer be a slave to sin; here, reason starts to shed old habits and more frequently choose freedom and life over sin and death.⁷⁹ Within this framework of thought, *concupiscentia* ("disordered desire") resists the ordering of the Spirit and is known as a "disease" that needs "the medicine of grace";⁸⁰ *caritas* never fully arrives in a person's life and *concupiscentia*, while it recedes to the background, "still remains until all our weakness is healed, as the renewal of the interior self-progresses from day to day until that day."⁸¹ As such, for Augustine, justification is very much a sanative

with "works of righteousness." Augustine, *Confessions* 10.2.2 (WSAT¹ 1:238); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.6 (WSAT³ 15:325); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 2.4 (WSAT¹ 12:188); Augustine, *Sermons* 169.9, 10; 292.6–7 (WSAT³ 5:228, 229; 8:142); Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 15.31 (WSAT¹ 26:29). This same correlation, albeit identified solely with grace, is noted by Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 11.18 (WSAT¹ 23:154); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 1.2.3 (WSAT¹ 12:187); Augustine, *Sermons* 131.9; 160.7; 292.6 (WSAT³ 4:231; 5:133; 8:143); Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 6.13 (WSAT¹ 26:15); Augustine, *Letters* 140.30.71 (WSAT² 281); Augustine, *Diverse Questions* 1.2.3 (WSAT¹ 12:187).

⁷⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 9.1.1–3.18 (WSAT¹ 5:337–57) as noted by O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 110.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *The City of God* 19.13 (WSAT¹ 7:16–17); so also O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 37. This perspective of justification allows ethics to be metaphysical, ontological, and teleological. For a defense that ethics is metaphysical and teleological, see O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 38–45.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *The City of God* 13.13 (WSAT¹ 7:79); Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscentia* 1.29.32 (WSAT¹ 24:48). This *concupiscentia* is known by the Greek fathers as *φιλαντρος* ("self-centeredness"; cf. 2 Tim 3:2).

⁸¹ Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscentia* 1.25.28; cf. 30.33 (WSAT¹ 24:46; cf. 24:48). For Augustine, this means *concupiscentia* ". . . is not now a sin in those who

event and a process.

An Objection

Typically, one objection to the above understanding of Augustine's view of justification arises. This objection is captured by two questions: What about the thief on the cross?⁸² Does not Augustine present faith as the ground of justification and good works as the necessary evidence of this faith?⁸³ Both questions challenge Augustine's view of justification as a process that makes the ungodly godly.⁸⁴ Even if one ignores all the above thoughts that identify Augustine's understanding of justification as both a sanative event and a process, three important factors remain that address this one objection.

First, Augustine's grace that justifies is not strictly a forensic concept. He mentions in *Enchiridion* (AD 421) that Christians "are both freed from their sins and justified by the very grace which made Christ the man unable to have any sin."⁸⁵ He upholds this incarnational, transformational perspective of justification in several places. His thoughts in *Against Julian*

have been reborn, provided they do not consent to it for acts that are forbidden and the mind, remaining sovereign, does not hand over the members to it to carry out those acts" (Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.23.25 [WSAT¹ 24:44]). This last point on *concupiscentia*, as is well noted by Aidan Nichols, lies at the heart of the seventieth-century Catholic-Protestant divide and their different understanding of justification, namely, does it just involve an imputed righteousness or an impartation of righteousness that starts from the baptismal waters (Aidan Nichols, "The Lutheran-Catholic Agreement on Justification: Botch or Breakthrough?" *NBf* 82.967 [2001]: 81–82)?

⁸² This thief is noted in Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, 51.17; 67.41; 110.3 (WSAT³ 17:29, 360; 19:288); Augustine, *Sermons* 2.9 (WSAT³ 1:16–17). Augustine knows the justified thief on the cross as "endowed with righteousness, independently of any righteous actions" but also as one who has "fervor in the heart" that easily associates with worship to God and the good of his neighbor. This heart of wellbeing is understood by Augustine as an expression of good from the justified thief to the second thief on the cross.

⁸³ E.g., Cho, "Divine Acceptance," 175–78.

⁸⁴ Within these discussions certain Augustinian quotes are often elevated at the expense of others to win the argument. E.g., Cho, "Justification," 167–75 mentions several references that support his argument that justification for Augustine is "not a process but an event," but he does not address most of the references noted in the sections one through three of this essay.

⁸⁵ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 11.36; cf. 12.40; 28.108 (WSAT¹ 8:296, 296–97, 299, 335–36).

Opus Imperfectum (AD 430) adequately summarize this view. In this treatise he writes, "Human beings who are reborn in Christ are made righteous by the same grace by which Christ was born a righteous man. . . . He is an example of grace so that by believing in him we may hope that we will become righteous through him. . . . [God] produces by the Holy Spirit righteousness in human nature."⁸⁶ In these two quotes, the grace that justifies is not foremost forensic nor merited but rather efficacious, ontic, and incarnational.

From Augustine's earliest teaching days until his last, he maintains that God's cure of nature comes about by a Christian's identification with Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.⁸⁷ The Christian lives within these four mysteries, which are not simply mystical expressions. With respect to Christ, they are historical facts; with respect to a Christian, they are ontic realities by a Christian's faith-filled union with Christ.⁸⁸

Second, there is consonance with this incarnational aspect of God's justifying grace and Augustine's doctrine of *totus Christus* ("the whole Christ"). By his doctrine of *totus Christus*, Augustine teaches that Christ and his church are united as one single body, "one person" (*unus homo*). He states, "We are Christ too, because in some sense the whole Christ is Head and body."⁸⁹ He incorporates within his doctrine of *totus Christus* his understanding of Christian transformation—a transformation as noted above that occurs by the God who justifies. For he writes, "This is the wonderful exchange," Christ "takes us up into himself . . . to transfigure

⁸⁶ Augustine, *Against Julian Opus Imperfectum* 1.138–40 (WSAT¹ 25:144–46); besides what is mentioned in this paragraph, see also Augustine, *The Predestination of the Saints* 15.31 (WSAT¹ 26:124); Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 11.30 (WSAT¹ 26:75); Augustine, *Against Julian Opus Imperfectum* 4.84 (WSAT¹ 25:450); Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 49.2 (WSAT³ 16:381); cf. Augustine, *Sermons* 192.1 (WSAT³ 6:34); Augustine, *The Trinity* 14.12.15 (WSAT¹ 5:491).

⁸⁷ E.g., Augustine, *Christian Instructions* 1.15.14–21 (WSAT¹ 11:116–17); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 14.52–53 (WSAT¹ 8:304–5).

⁸⁸ See, e.g., *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 14.53; 31.118 (WSAT¹ 8:305, 341).

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 26.2.2 (WSAT³ 15:275). Not only did Augustine's doctrine of *totus Christus* ground his entire soteriology and ecclesiology, but it also grounded his exegesis of Scripture: ". . . the head and the body . . . Christ and his Church, that total mystery with which all scriptures are concerned." Augustine, *Enarrations of the Psalms* 79.1 (WSAT³ 18:141).

us into himself.”⁹⁰ And, in *Grace and Free Will* he states a Christian receives “the grace of God to justify the sinner, that is, to make him righteous from sinful.”⁹¹ This ontological transformation is made possible, in Augustine’s view, by God’s grace that justifies. This is so that “Christ might be the head and [Christians] might be his members” so that faith may work through love.⁹² This love progresses by “a will fully aflame with divine love.”⁹³ New life “has originated in us,” for “the eternal [i.e. the Son] allied himself to us.”⁹⁴ And, “healing is produced with our cooperation by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rom 7:25), . . . by the Holy Spirit, by whom in a hidden manner love is poured out in our hearts (Rom 5:5).”⁹⁵ Here, Augustine does not explain the “wonderful exchange” in terms of the law court. Rather, he uses concepts related to ontology, healing, participation, and the gift of the Holy Spirit’s love made possible because of Christ.

Third, Augustine’s thoughts should not be removed from their Nicene context and his acceptance of the Nicaean Creed.⁹⁶ The authors of this creed—as well as those who influenced them and followed them—insisted on the importance of the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation.⁹⁷ These

⁹⁰ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 30.2.3 (WSAT³ 15:323).

⁹¹ Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 6.13 (WSAT¹ 26:15); cf. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 29.6 (WSAT³ 12:493–94).

⁹² Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance* 24.67 (WSAT¹ 26:196).

⁹³ Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.34 (WSAT¹ 26:32); Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 1.6 (WSAT¹ 8:275); cf. Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.33–39; 20.41 (WSAT¹ 26:31–36, 37–39).

⁹⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.18.24 (WSAT¹ 1:212).

⁹⁵ Augustine, *Perfection in Human Righteousness*, 20.43 (WSAT¹ 23:303; emphasis original); see also Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 17.33 (WSAT¹ 26:31–32); McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47; Wright, “Justification,” 70, 72. Admittedly Augustine mentions, “Good works do not precede [a Christian’s] justification as an entitlement but follow it to demonstrate what he has received.” *Enarrations on the Psalms* 110.3; cf. 31.2.3, 7 (WSAT³ 19:288; cf. 15:364–65, 370). These sermons from Psalms could refer to justification as an event without diminishing it as a process. How is this possible? Augustine does not dissociate the event of justification from its process; e.g., “One begins to be a child of peace at the point when he obeys and believes this good news and when, having become righteous on the basis of faith, he begins to have peace with God.” Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 15.46 (WSAT¹ 26:89).

⁹⁶ John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2.1 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s seminary Press, 2004), 3.

⁹⁷ E.g., Justin Martyr (AD 100–165), Theophilus of Antioch (AD ? –183/5),

theologians wholeheartedly allowed this doctrine to inform their understanding of the transforming effect of divine grace for the Christian. This emphasis was later summed up by Athanasius of Alexandria: “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηθρώπισεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).⁹⁸ As per Khaled Anatolios, this dynamic represented for Augustine a “purificatory process of knowing God.”⁹⁹ Within this context, Augustine understood the “starting point of faith” (*initio fidei*) not as a punctiliar event only but rather as the beginning of an ascent, a way (*via*) toward the full vision of God, a reordering of faith that makes the “diseased” person’s “ailing mind well for the perception of unchanging truth.”¹⁰⁰ Here, how a person starts their journey is how a person continues it. This view of soteriology is only possible for Augustine, it is argued here, when the grace that justifies, at its core, represents a continuum toward its *telos*.

Conclusion

I have argued above that Augustine understood justification as ontological and sanative, an event and a process that associates with “to make righteous.” This perspective of justification is illustrated above in several of Augustine’s sermons as well as three treatises of his: *The Spirit and the Letter*, *Confessions*, and *Nature and Grace*.

Augustine incorporated into his view of justification what became familiar reformational terms—namely, *sola fides* (“faith alone”) and *sola gratia* (“grace alone”). To these concepts, it is argued above, Augustine equally discussed a sanative aspect of justification that allowed him to include within this doctrine the concept of *sola caritate* (“by love alone”). This allowed him to inseparably connect two equally important concepts: justification as a forensic declaration of righteousness and justification as a healing of the inner being. Augustine would emphasize the former aspect of justification, many of the sixteenth-century Reformers the latter. His

Irenaeus (AD 130–202), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170–236), Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 300–373), Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329–390), Basil of Caesarea (AD 330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (AD 331/40–395), Augustine (AD 354–430), Cyril of Alexandria (AD 375–444), and Maximus the Confessor (AD 580–662).

⁹⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, ed. John Behr, Popular Patristics Series 44a (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 166–67.

⁹⁹ Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 244.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.1; 2.4 (WSAT¹ 5:63, 66–67); cf. Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 242–45.

view of justification fit his historical context, the reformers' theirs.

Prior to the Reformation, the European church primarily taught salvation as only through the cradle of the church and her sacraments. Further, a person was never fully assured of their salvation. The reformers wrote against this model. Steeped in ideas from the Middle Ages of heaven and hell and purgatory, their driving question became, How do I find a gracious God? Melancthon and Calvin insisted on five key points with respect to the doctrine of justification: it was "by faith alone" (*sola fide*), "outside of us" (*extra nos*), not "in us" (*in nobis*), the determinative factor of who was a part of the church, and "the article by which the church stands or falls."

Contrastingly, though Augustine's latter works argued against a Pelagian understanding of salvation, all of his works fit within a time period of Patristic theology very different from these reformers. The theologians before and immediately after Augustine developed a soteriology grounded in the view that healing and salvation took place through participation, solidarity, and exchange.¹⁰¹ Augustine's thoughts on justification, it is argued in this essay, fit within this stream of thought.¹⁰²

God's truth is not relative. However, theologians must properly discern both God's truth and their own time. They then endeavor to teach doctrine to the people of their times. Everyone does this imperfectly and with bias. Many of the reformers, who per Martin Luther recognized that Augustine's explanation on justification lacked "detail" and with respect to imputation was "imperfectly" explained, paved their own way forward on the doctrine of justification.¹⁰³ These reformers served their generation well, as did Augustine. Will the theologians of today achieve a similar reputation?

Fifteen years ago, Augustinian scholar and ethicist Oliver O'Donovan warned about a justification that dissociates from "to make righteous."

¹⁰¹ Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 75; T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 62.

¹⁰² Irenaeus (AD 130–202) is credited as launching this ontological, incarnational view of salvation that eventually crystalized in the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451). He states, "The word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through his transcendent love, became what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5 preface (ANF 1:526).

¹⁰³ Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. H. T. Lehman, Luther's Works: American Edition 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 334; cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, Library of Christian Classics 20 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.11.16 (1:746).

He then stated,

The correlate of a "justification" which has nothing to do with "righteousness" is a righteousness which has nothing to do with justification, and this soon presented itself to Protestant thought under the heading of "sanctification." The improper divorce of sanctification from justification bequeathed Protestant churches their characteristic tension between the gospel with no concern for life in the world and a concern for life in the world which has lost touch with the gospel.¹⁰⁴

If the thesis of this essay has been properly defended above, Augustine's perspective of justification, at its core, challenges the theologians of today to take O'Donovan's noted problem seriously.

¹⁰⁴ O'Donovan, *Moral Order*, 254.