

Rhetorical Approach to the Poor and Poverty in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

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INTRODUCTION

Augustine wrote, preached, and dictated, for nearly thirty years, all 150 Psalms in the form of homilies which, together with his homiletic commentaries as the Johannine tractates, were neither entitled nor mentioned in his *Retractationes*. Based on the *Vetus Latina* version of the Psalms, these expositions were preached to his congregations in a number of different places, whether at Carthage, Hippo, Thagaste, or elsewhere, within a wide range of liturgical cycles. Some of these were delivered on Vigils or festivals of the African martyrs. Many were given at Vespers, and eventually also at Matins, while 'relatively few' arose from eucharistic celebrations, or in Lent and Eastertide, including one in Holy Week. With regard to questions of the chronological precision of individual *Expositions*, indications, which are sporadically given in Augustine's letters, would collaborate with internal signs as the cases of self-quotation, parallel texts, and classification of the Psalms. Although the assignment to definite dates is a matter of educated guesses and largely hypothetical, it is readily apparent that, shortly after his ordination to the priesthood in the year 391, the exegesis of the first thirty-two Psalms took the form of brief explanatory notes. And, as is evident from his letter written in 415, the final expositions on Psalm 118 was begun to complete the whole project of his homiletic commentary, which was concluded with more extensive expositions in the year 421 or 422. His *Expositions* are indeed, touching on a wide range of pastoral, apologetic, philosophical, and theological issues, the most comprehensive and sophisticated exegetical commitment to the book of Psalms wherein a single word might hide the secret passage to several others, all together fixed upon the mystery of Christ.

Keep in mind all the poor, needy, hungry and thirsty people, travelers far from home, the ill-clad, the sick, the prisoners. Try to understand about a poor person of this sort, because if you do, you will understand about him who said, I was an hungry, I was thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick and in prison (Matth. 25:35-36).¹

Bearing in mind the prevalence of the descriptions of the poor, it is not astonishing that in the *Expositions* Augustine develops various modes of expression that seem to explicit his intention of bridging social gulf between the poor and the rich. In a recent article entitled 'Portraying the Poor: Descriptions of Poverty in Christian Texts from

¹ *en. Ps.* 40.2; WSA 3/16, 227.

the Late Roman Empire'², Richard Finn claims that the extended descriptions of the poor in the *Expositions* should not be overestimated, and that attention ought to be focused on the instances in which much about the poor remains unreasonably hidden. Finn argues about the way in which Augustine forms the theological basis for placing the poor and the rich equally and side by side before God, so too, encouraging his congregations to give alms. With regard to his rhetorical reframing of the poor, some indication of the compelling evidence may be given more.

Examples showing how he concentrates on the themes relating to poverty and the poor would be taken from many of Augustine's *Expositions*. Patristic preachers in the fourth and fifth centuries gave various reasons why Christians should give alms by calling together well over one hundred scriptural passages. And in fact some advocates did appeal to rhetorical strategies in their promotion. Did Augustine pursue the adoption of its strategies by which he promoted almsgiving to his congregations? What was the adaptability of established linguistic technique to the social realities in late antique society? Our attention, thus, has to be focused on to the cases in which Augustine highly develops the rhetorical device for describing the poor in the exegesis of Psalms. In this paper I will be dealing in brief the way in which Augustine draws themes to the poor and the rich into relationship with their spiritual value, thereby holding a figurative meaning of the verses of Psalms to the light of 'Christ and his Church, that total mystery with which all the scriptures are concerned'.³ I shall restrict my consideration to Augustine's early expositions in the period between 391 and about 400, when Augustine has just begun working as a newly ordained priest, then as a bishop of a North African church.

First I shall approach to his concise notes and some longer expositions on the first thirty-two psalms, looking at how Augustine uses the rhetorical device for the description of the poor. Then I consider his interpretation of some expositions up to the year around 400. Finally I suggest even tentatively his ways by which the representation of the poor would rather serve as the feasibility of transcending the social realities than being worthy beneficiaries of his congregations.

FIRST DESCRIPTIONS OF THE POOR IN THE DESK COMMENTARIES

My first account of the poor begins by relating Augustine's earliest and concise notes dated as early as 391, and proceeds with the prolonged explanations of the first written series of his expositions.

Throughout his *Expositions*, Augustine enters into the discussion of symbolic meaning in various numbers, which was admittedly influenced by Alexandrian allegorical and mystical exegesis. At the beginning of his expounding Psalm 11, Augustine interprets the meaning of 'octave', the number eight, in accord with his explanation of

² *Poverty in the Roman World*, Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, eds. (2006), 130-144.

³ *en. Ps.* 79.1; *WBA* 3/18, 141.

the title of Psalm 6: 'To the end, for the eighth, a psalm of David'.⁴ As shown in the *Expositions* 6.2, the 'octave' signifies the day of judgement, since all time is a sequence of weeks, seven days, the eighth would mean that which comes after this sequence, that is the 'eternal age' which will be awarded to the saints. Augustine's conviction is, thus, that Psalm 11 was devoted to addressing those who was suffering from shortage of saints, thereby applying his recognition to the Psalms, which was totally to be regarded as prophetic: he names the psalmist a prophet.⁵ This clear view has exegetical consequences. Augustine describes the pity for 'the needy' by the Lord himself as follows:

This, however, should be taken as spoken in the person of God the Father who deigned to send his Son for the sake of the poor and needy, that is, those who suffered need and poverty in lacking spiritual good things.⁶

The words of the Psalm relevant to the economy of salvation explicitly exclude the literal poor from reflection in his explanation of Psalm 11.6. It appears that Augustine is trying to bring together as many scriptural texts concerning spiritualised poverty as he can, for he immediately moves on to quote Matthew 5:3-9, introducing it with the words, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit ...' This Matthaean text is of course one which is referred to the blessed in the beatitudes, pointing as it does to a correlation between spiritual value of the poor and the promise of a heavenly reward. This is something emphasised by him. It seems, therefore, that Augustine does feel a need to justify for the discourse of poverty in an eschatological dimension and he does so by means of the figurative interpretation that the poor are modelled on the rich in terms of spiritual and heavenly reward.⁷

The first exposition of Psalm 21 comprises two main parts. It is its first part (§ 3-22) where Christ was envisaged as speaking about his passion, abandonment, and resurrection in his own name. Then, the latter part (§ 23-32) shows that the fate of the Church was already manifested in the impetus of Christ's prayer, in which Augustine has the reference to the poor twice. An indispensable part of this brief commentary is that the cry of Christ on the cross was not only raised 'in the guise (*persona*) of Adam'(21.1.7), but also takes on a soteriological aspect, in that Christ directed those words to the Father 'in my own person as Jesus Christ'.

for I thought that human pride would then deign to imitate my own humility.⁸

As the voice of Adam and that of the old self is adopted as his own, so too could the whole of humanity be included in those words of Christ to the Father. Yet, the voice of Christ in his totality also confirms that it would be taken as an exemplary form of the prayer into which the poor can place themselves, and follow the right attitude towards God in this action.

⁴ *en. Ps.* 11.1; WSA 3/15, 170.

⁵ *en. Ps.* 11.7; WSA 3/15, 171.

⁶ *en. Ps.* 11.6; WSA 3/15, 171.

⁷ *en. Ps.* 11.8; WSA 3/15, 172.

⁸ *en. Ps.* 21.1.7; WSA 3/15, 222.

The prayer God did not disdain is not the prayer of those who cry to him in sinful words, hoping that their empty life may not pass away, but the prayer of a poor person, one not swollen with transient ostentation.⁹

Asserting the lesson for the poor on humility, Augustine uses the imagery of comparing the nourishment of the heart with food. Since the poor feeds on the food, they attain the wealth. This imagery of eating the food will be shown in the second expositions of Psalm 21 more in detail.

Next, I would like to consider the more detailed and desk commentaries on Psalms 9 and 10 written in 393. At the beginning of his *Exposition 9* (9.1), Augustine interprets the theme of 'the hidden things of the son' in Psalm 9. With the combination of the complaints and the praise for God, and that of God as the refuge of the oppressed and God as the judge of the enemy, he discloses the two comings of Christ, the one already past and hidden, and the other future and open. He then begins by being concerned primarily with the 'hidden things of the Son, that is, both his coming in humility, ... and the punishment which now is being meted out secretly'.¹⁰

*The Lord has become a refuge for the poor. ... To such a pauper as this the Lord has become a refuge, a helper at times when he is needed, in tribulation. He makes people poor, inasmuch as he scourges every son whom he receives. (Hebr. 12:6) ... for the soul is not turned to God except while it is turning away from this world. There is no more appropriate time for it to be turning away from this world than when toils and tribulations are mixed in with in its futile, harmful and dangerous pleasure.*¹¹

Such a view is characteristic of his descriptions of the poor consequent on a total commitment to the eschatological message for the oppressed in this world. In this passage, however, it might seem that the Lord is described as looking kindly on the poor¹² only if they complete the separation of their mind from temporal things, in other words, follow the rule of faith and moral duties. These notes on the poor appear, without elaboration, to be predominantly didactic for present readers.

How then does Augustine provide the result in the eschatological assertions to be found in this expositions? It is noteworthy that in the spiritualization of the poor he often sets side by side a statement that the hostile against God persecute the poor.

But, I ask, what is this lament of the poor which God does not forget? Is it the cry, *Have mercy on me, Lord, see how I have been humbled by my enemies?*¹³

⁹ *en. Ps.* 21.1 25; WSA 3/15, 225.

¹⁰ *en. Ps.* 9.1; WSA 3/15, 140.

¹¹ *en. Ps.* 9.10; WSA 3/15, 146.

¹² Cf. *en. Ps.* 10.5, 45.2.

¹³ *en. Ps.* 9.14; WSA 3/15, 148.

His [sc. Antichrist] eyes look toward the poor, for he will persecute most of all those righteous people about whom the Lord said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*¹⁴

Most inclusively, perhaps, Augustine does not stop using the word 'enemy' in expounding the lament and thanksgiving in the Psalmist's words.¹⁵ And here the pictures which emerge are more varied ones, in general as sinner, or according to the contemporary accounts as the heretics and false brethren, or spiritually as the devil and Antichrist. Augustine's words can act to be more and more acutely as conscious of the distance between those who separate 'a great number of poor people' from God and the one 'who first was made poor for our sakes, although he was rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9)'¹⁶. But Augustine is equally aware of the acclamation by a psalmist: 'in happiness shall I be held fast by your salvation, which is our Lord Christ, God's power and wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24)'.¹⁷ Augustine's thinking is increasingly concerned with the correlation between the long-suffering poor and the poor in heaven. Hence, the inclination in his interpretation which focuses on eschatological realities — the ultimate mode of existence of the poor in eternity — is the exegetical consequence of this insight on Christ's two comings.

Augustine's observations on the poor in the *Expositiones* 10 begin by expounding the lament for the poor, similar to the preceding interpretation of Psalm 9, in which the psalmist affirmed the Lord 'who has become a refuge for the poor'.¹⁸ He shows steady awareness of their hope for divine assistance and the persecution and oppression of the heretics. The poor have experienced from all sufferings. It is to be noted in this connection that he poses the question of whether among a crowd of rich people God will be able to discern a few poor ones in order to bring them up in the bosom of the Church. Although such doubt is quickly dispelled, it appears to correlate closely with Augustine's explanation of the intention of Psalm 10.

It seems to me that it [sc. Ps. 9] should be sung against the heretics. By rehearsing and exaggerating the sins of many in the Church, as if either all or the majority of the just were with them, they struggle to turn us aside and tear us away from the breasts of the one Church, the true mother, asserting that Christ is with them.¹⁹

The heretics are the Donatist schism. And a handful of the poor already mentioned are designated as the 'poor of Christ'.²⁰ Accordingly the poor, who are nevertheless interpreted as those looking for Christ in terms of spiritual need, might be identified with Augustine's congregations who are to resist the temptation of the Donatists and to be comforted by the words of their reject. Since, in Hippo Regius, the Donatists were in a majority in the late fourth century, these texts might provide a contemporary and vivid

¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 9.27; WSA 3/15, 155.

¹⁵ See *en. Ps.* 9.4, 9.8, 9.10, 9.14, 9.23, 9.32, 9.35.

¹⁶ *en. Ps.* 9.14; WSA 3.15, 148.

¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 9.15; WSA 3/15, 149.

¹⁸ *en. Ps.* 10.8; WSA 3/15, 167.

¹⁹ *en. Ps.* 10.1; WSA 3/15, 160.

²⁰ *en. Ps.* 10.8; WSA 3/15, 167.

account of the church in Hippo, in which Augustine has battled the Donatists with their schismatic tendencies. However, the concrete identification of the poor remains limited.

SECOND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE POOR IN THE SERMONS

We shall now turn to the texts in the next stage, in which Augustine starts preaching a series of homilies to his congregations in Hippo and seems to set out the spiritual and theological aspects of being poor more clearly.

The second exposition of Psalm 21, explicating more carefully and thoroughly than does the first exposition and being intended for the Donatists who were accused of the significance of the Lord's passion, speaks about the prayer of the truly poor in its latter part. An even more affectionate look at the poor is expressed at Psalm 21:25: 'For he has not rejected or scorned the prayer of the poor'. With regard to the remark that the poor do not rely upon themselves, it seems to be closely related with the interpretation of the first exposition, in which he considers the lesson for the poor as requiring them humility. And then, apparently and severely alluding to the arrogance of the Donatists' self-appreciation (Ps. 21:26), Augustine proceeds to comment on the next verse (Ps. 21:27),²¹ taking it as a starting-point for his descriptions of the poor, those descriptions in which he also quotes the latter part of the same verse²² in support of his view. He appears to be concerned with enumerating the behaviours of the poor, using the imagery of eating the food.

they eat seeking to be satisfied.

The poor will eat heartily.

And they suffered like him on whom they fed.

it is the one who imitates him who is filled. The poor have imitated him.²³

In the process of these actions (seeking, eating, being suffered, and imitating), we find the original intention of the poor. They eat the food, because they hope that their hearts will be satisfied with the food which has been already realised as the nourishment by themselves. And, with an expression of deep satisfaction,

the poor praise the Lord.²⁴

We find here the end result of their doings. Augustine, in the last part of the interpretation, recapitulates the steps taken by the poor as follows:

the poor look for what can fill their hearts: and when their hearts are full they who seek the Lord praise him.²⁵

²¹ 'The poor shall eat and be satisfied.'

²² 'Those who seek the Lord will praise him.'

²³ *en. Ps. 21.2.27*; WSA 3/15, 237-238.

²⁴ *en. Ps. 21.2.27*; WSA 3/15, 238.

²⁵ *en. Ps. 21.2.27*; WSA 3/15, 238.

In fact, Augustine's conviction in which he speaks of the Lord as fulfilling the spiritual need, that is, 'the Lord himself is the wealth of the poor'²⁶, is crucial for our understanding of the fate of the poor who have been moved by their plight and who, in turn, praise the Lord sought for. Hence, the descriptions of the poor in a spiritualizing manner, in order to point out the exemplary function of the prayer of the poor, would involve the correlating and mutually associating speeches referring to the poor and riches: the Lord is the wealth of the poor, and the poor eat the food which is the belching out of the wealth.²⁷

At the beginning of his *Expositions* 101, Augustine raises the question as to whether 'one single poor man' praying here would be Christ. After considering in detail its possibility, the very concept of the identification of Christ with the poor makes a decisive move on to the explanation of its title: '*The entreaty of a poor man when he was wrung with pain, and pours out his prayer in the presence of the Lord*', thereby sharing the same thing with the recognition of a suppliant revealed in Psalm 60:3: '*From the ends of the earth I have called to you, as my heart was wrung with pain*'.²⁸ Here he makes reference to these texts, together with a verse from Isaiah 61:10: '*He has adorned me like a bridegroom with his wreath, and decked me like a bride with her jewels*', in which Augustine accepts the possibility of denominating him, that is Christ, inclusively both bride and bridegroom. From such texts, therefore, it becomes clear that Augustine's sentiments concerning the prayer in the words of lament are tempered in a spiritualizing and united manner by christological and ecclesiological perspective: not only this poor prayer is defined as the true messenger of the pray in a prophetic dimension but understood as the one human being, the whole Christ (*Christus totus*): 'One voice only, then, because only one flesh'²⁹, in so far as a foreshadowing of the true unity of Christ and the church to come.

It is noteworthy that this passage of Isaiah seems to be one of his earliest quotations, with which he shows a picture of bridegroom and bride, the formula taken as the relevance either to Christ as head of a body, or to the Church, through an organic unity of head and body in corporeal personality. Although his treatment does not give us the same explanation as in the second redaction of *De doctrina christiana* (3.31.44), in which he adds a second text from Galatians³⁰ in order to illustrate the first Tyconian Rule of the Lord and His Body, it might seem that already in the mid 390's, possibly after the time he begged his bishop Valerius to grant him for studying the scriptures, Augustine is devoting himself to reading the Donatist exegete for his christological interpretation of the Psalms.³¹

²⁶ *en. Ps.* 21.2.27; WSA 3/15, 238.

²⁷ Cf. *en. Ps.* 21.1.27; WSA 3/15, 226.

²⁸ *en. Ps.* 101.1.2; WSA 3/19, 48.

²⁹ *en. Ps.* 101.1.2; WSA 3/19, 48.

³⁰ Gal. 3:29: 'Therefore you are the seed of Abraham.'

³¹ Another references of Augustine to Isaiah would be found in the following works as: *serm.* 91.7.8 (after 400); *serm.* 341.9.11 (403 or 417); *In epistulam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus* 1.2 (406/407); *en. Ps.* 30.2.4 (411, 412/7); *en. Ps.* 74.4 (411/412); *ep.* 140.6.18 (411/412).

Another texts which are important to Augustine's view of the poor prayer are 2 Cor. 8:9 and Ps. 101.10. When we look at the expositions where he interprets the poor as standing for Christ himself, it is clear that it is often connected in his explanation with some scriptural texts such as the words of Paul to the Corinthians³² and again with Matthew 25 and Luke 19. Notwithstanding the significance of the Corinthian passage in identifying Christ with the poor, the deep despair and 'in such penury'³³ in Psalm 101:10: '*The bread I ate was ashes, and my drink I would dilute with weeping*', is essential in Augustine's eyes as an idea of corporeal personality. It appears to be seen not only as his assumption of human nature, but as the utterance of those inclusively through membership of Christ's body, so too, 'he must be our head and we his members.'³⁴ Indeed, Augustine repeats the verse of Psalm 101 three times within this exegesis and considers human corporeality. Hence, the combination of his lexical imagination about the destitution in Ps. 101 and the identification of the poor would bring his understanding of the poor prayer to its christological dimension.

In his interpretation of Psalm 145.2, first Augustine deals with the prosopological question about the prayer's address and looks at the self-regulating entity of the soul as the speaker of the praise, then turns his attention to the temporality of the praise in this world. So too, he expounds the phrase from Ps. 145:2: 'throughout my life', as offering the possibility of wholeheartedly praising the Lord by living in hope of the world to come. Here Augustine presents a picture of a pauper lying at a gate of a rich man that would call to mind immediately the Dives and Lazarus story in Luke 16:19-31. Although in the end of this interpretation the text is quoted from Luke 16:26, the parable given here indicates only the name of Abraham. And there is no reference to the particular circumstances, Lazarus' feelings, and the conversation between Abraham and the Dives to point to more effective way of simplifying the story, so that the hope with which the life in the future is promised would be further emphasised by Augustine. Setting the poor against the rich from the eschatological viewpoint, therefore, he has no intention of giving his congregations the detailed imagery of the poor.

The second exposition of Psalm 33, subsequent to the first one in the previous day, was delivered in Hippo, in which Augustine, after recapitulating the interpretation of the title briefly, attempts to understand the figurative meaning of the verses. First, approaching to the verse of Psalm 33.2: '*I will bless the Lord, at all times*', he poses the question of 'When are you to *bless the Lord*?' to his congregations.³⁵ Immediately provided an answer: '*at all times*', he then defines those blessing the Lord as being 'humble of heart'.³⁶ And, quoting from Psalm 33.7: '*this poor man cried out, and the*

³² 2 Cor. 8:9: 'the one of whom the apostle wrote, Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might be enriched.'

³³ en. Ps. 101.1.2; WSA 3/19, 47

³⁴ en. Ps. 101.1.2; WSA 3/19, 47.

³⁵ en. Ps. 33.2.3; WSA 3/16, 25.

³⁶ en. Ps. 33.2.4; WSA 3/16, 25.

Lord hearkened,³⁷ Augustine describes those crying to the Lord as the poor in terms of spiritual need.

Cry to him in such a way that even if you have possessions, you do not trust in your own resources, cry to him in a fame of mind that understands your need, cry to him in the knowledge that you will always be a pauper as long as you do not possess him who makes you rich.³⁸

His assimilation of the humble and the poor has positive aspect with regard to their spiritual qualification. Augustine shows the distinction from the viewpoints of receiving God's eternal salvation, for those poor who are humble and fear God, whereas those rich who are proud and do not fear God will not receive the true recompense in heaven. It is a process of transposing the verses from the material and bodily realm into the spiritual dimension that includes some reinterpretations of Psalms in the New Testament:

the weakness of God is stronger than mortals. (1 Cor. 1:25)³⁹

When the men who had crucified him came and found he had already expired, they did not break his legs, though they did break the legs of the thieves ... (John 19:32-33)⁴⁰

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. (John 6:41)⁴¹

Bless are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matth. 5:6)⁴²

Augustine furthermore suggests his congregations to turn their attention to the Gospel story of the rich and the pauper in Luke 16:19-31, thereby drawing a sharp distinction of two types of human beings, the one lying in the arms of Abraham and the other being tormented in hell. Although he does not call the name of Lazarus, his concentration on vividly detailed narrative of the poor and the rich, mostly at the time of death, would rather sharpen the disparity between their lives in this world and the future fate in heaven.

At this point we find that, in his interpretation of the verses of Psalm 33:10: '*Fear the Lord, you his saint, for they who fear him lack for nothing*',⁴³ those who accept the necessity of cheating others in their handicrafts emerge, and express anxiety about losing their wealth, probably in their small business. Similar picture, then, shown by Augustine in connection with the heavenly reward is their last days among material abundance and the funeral conducted for the riches luxuriously. Thus, with using this visual imagery of the rich which must have seen by some of his congregations and could have corresponded to some of them, in his preaching, our life would become the central point in its eschatological dimension.

³⁷ *en. Ps.* 33.2.11; WSA 3/16, 32.

³⁸ *en. Ps.* 33.2.11; WSA 3/16, 32.

³⁹ *en. Ps.* 33.2.4; WSA 3/16, 25.

⁴⁰ *en. Ps.* 33.2.7; WSA 3/16, 28.

⁴¹ *en. Ps.* 33.2.15; WSA 3/16, 35.

⁴² *en. Ps.* 33.2.15; WSA 3/16, 35.

⁴³ *en. Ps.* 33.2.14; WSA 3/16, 34.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Augustine's earliest commentaries and sermons in the *Expositiones* seem to hold the resonance of the word power found in the Psalm interpretation. Not only does he offer a variety of interpretations on the verses of a Psalm at hand, but he finds the parallel passages in some other Psalms and the New Testament, so that he gets together many scriptural texts concerning the descriptions of the poor, thereby showing the spiritual, christological, eschatological, and ecclesiological aspect of the problematic. Augustine's exposition is frequently able to get the literal sense of the words as a starting point, and with resorting to any figurative interpretation to grow it purposefully, so that the illustrations of the poor are understood in the light of the exemplary behaviour towards the faith. The rhetorical approach to these passages may range widely. It expands from the lamentation and cry of the long-suffering poor, through the prayer of the poor awaiting for heavenly reward and praising the Lord, all the way to an instance of the poor prayer identified with Christ in corporeal personality which represents the intermingled layer of christological and ecclesiological interpretation. Although he could describe the graphic and full picture of those who were worried about their financial management and business, and expressed concern about their own burial, Augustine's continual and consistent messages to his reader and congregation are not confronted with their social realities in late antique society. In his earliest expositions, indeed, he excludes the literal poor from his explanations of the verses, and does not promote actively almsgiving to his congregations. Even in the parable of the Dives and Lazarus in Luke's Gospel, without turning their attention to the poor around his church, Augustine is rather concerned with the future fate of people in heaven. And, under threat of the schismatic Donatists, the identification of the poor remains restricted. In accordance with the themes of the Psalms explicated at an early stage of his activities, it is his focal point of the rhetorical approach to the descriptions of the poor that, by fitting with a safety device, makes plain the exemplary form of the prayer and the comfort of the oppressed. Augustine's thinking is, thus, increasingly marked by the basic conviction about the poor in terms of spiritual qualification.