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### Spiritual Itinerary of the Soul to God in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine\*

In book eight of his *Confessions*, Augustine described how he became familiar with the story of Antony, decided to imitate him and read a passage from Romans as a message from God. However, the language of the conversion scene includes a Plotinian element. Augustine shows us the incident in the garden at Milan partly in the way that Plotinus chose to explain the ascent of the soul to the divine. This itinerary would not be interpreted as a temporal and spatial movement. According to Plotinus, it is to be realised by opening the interior eye of our mind. He repeatedly emphasises the mode of waking the inner vision within the soul. In his treatise entitled ‘On the beautiful’ (*Enneads* 1.6), Plotinus clearly states that, along with the soul becoming beautiful and good, it becomes like God. His concern for the soul’s liberation from the passions reaches to the crucial point of his discussion about the means and the device for the spiritual vision of inaccessible beauty.

‘Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland’: this is the soundest counsel. But what is this flight? How are we to gain the open sea? For Odysseus is surely a parable to us when he commands the flight from the sorceries of Circe or Calypso—not content to linger for all the pleasure offered to his eyes and all the delight of sense filling his days. The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and There is The Father. What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land; nor need you think of coach or ship to carry you away; all this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see; you must close the eyes and call instead upon

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another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that the flight of the soul to God occurred in both Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo. Although Augustine's use of Eastern patristic literature and his relationship with Greek patristic writers have been examined, this relationship to them may seem ambiguous.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I summarise the characteristics of Gregory and Augustine's descriptions of the soul's journey to God, from the viewpoint of how they employ the Plotinian language. I then consider the similarities and differences of these passages, thereby suggesting the possibility that Augustine was in some way affected by Gregory's treatment of the spiritual itinerary.

#### GREGORY OF NYSSA: *DE ORATIONE DOMINICA*

In a sequence of five homilies, *De oratione dominica*, directed to the masses of the faithful, Gregory of Nyssa interprets the Lord's Prayer in each of its invocations. Although there is still uncertainty about the date of composition of this work, it seems highly likely that he began writing it around 380, when his writing activities were becoming more productive and fruitful.<sup>3</sup> After emphasising the necessity of prayer in its soteriological dimension in the opening homily, he proceeds to the explanation of the invocation, *Our Father, who art Heaven*, in the second homily. It is interesting to note that, with specific attention to both the parable of the prodigal son and his confession in the gospel of Luke, Gregory emphasises the kindness of the father as a factor in demanding the return of the soul to our 'beautiful fatherland'.

Thus the return of the young man to his Father's home became to him *the occasion of experiencing the lovingkindness of his Father*; for this paternal home is the Heaven against which, as he says to his Father, he has sinned. In the same way it seems to me that if the

<sup>1</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.8: Henry and Schwyzer, ed., 1, 115–116; MacKenna, trans., 63: *Φεύγωμεν δὴ φύλην ἐς πατρίδα, ἀληθέστερον ἢ τις παρακελεύοιτο. Τίς οὖν ἡ φυγὴ καὶ πῶς; Ἀναξόμεθα οἷον ἀπὸ μάγου Κίρκης φησὶν ἢ Καλυψοῦς Ὀδυσσεὺς αἰνιττόμενος, δοκεῖ μοι, μείναι οὐκ ἀρεσθεῖς, καίτοι ἔχων ἡδονὰς δι' ὀμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶι αἰσθητῶι συνών. Πατρίς δὴ ἡμῖν, ὅθεν παρήλθομεν, καὶ πατὴρ ἐκεῖ. Τίς οὖν ὁ στόλος καὶ ἡ φυγὴ; Οὐ ποσὶ δεῖ διανύσαι πανταχοῦ γὰρ φέρονσι πόδες ἐπὶ γῆν ἄλλην ἀπ' ἄλλης οὐδέ σε δεῖ ἔππων ὄχημα ἢ τι θαλάττιον παρασκευάσαι, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἀφείναι δεῖ καὶ μὴ βλέπειν, ἀλλ' οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι, ἣν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρώνται δὲ ὀλίγοι.*

<sup>2</sup> See Henry 1934; Altaner 1967; Callahan 1967; Courcelle 1968; O'Connell 1994; Heidl 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See Kiria 2010.

Lord is teaching us to call upon the Father in Heaven, He means to remind you of our beautiful fatherland. And by thus putting into your mind a stronger desire for these good things, He sets you on the way that will lead you back to your original country.<sup>4</sup> [Italics mine]

Gregory follows the Greek philosophical tradition, in particular the Platonic view of the soul and its purification, when engaged in the interpretation of scriptural passages about the avoidance of evil in this world. How does he address the emancipation of the soul from bodily concerns? Using a Platonic passage from the *Theaetetus*: since the evils of this earth are ever present, humans must flee from earth to Heaven. Following this moral exhortation, their flight comprises the step of ‘becoming as like God as possible’. They become ‘like God’ when they become ‘just and pure, with understanding’.<sup>5</sup>

Now the way which leads human nature back to Heaven is none other than that of avoiding the evils of the world by flight; on the other hand, the purpose of fleeing from evils seems to me precisely to achieve likeness with God. To become like God means to become just, holy, and good and suchlike things.<sup>6</sup> [Italics mine]

Gregory’s description of attempting to bear resemblance, that is, ‘likeness with God’, seems to be inspired by the passage in Plato. The affirmation in the *Theaetetus* reinterpreted continuously within a Christian context shows us that the goal of the virtuous life is the imitation of God. The flight from the ‘evils of the world’ takes us to the attainment of the various virtues and to the reminiscence of our fatherland that the prayer inspires in us. Nonetheless, it has been clearly articulated by scholars such as Hubert Merki that Gregory develops the theme described here on Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.2.1), not directly on Plato.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2; PG 44, 1145A; ACW 18, 42: “Ὡσπερ τοίνυν ἐκεῖ τῆς παρά τοῦ πατρὸς φιλανθρωπίας αἰτία γέγονε τῷ νέῳ ἢ πρὸς τὴν πατρῶαν ἐστίαν ἐπιστροφή (αὕτη δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ οὐρανὸς εἰς ὃν πεπλημμεληκέναι τῷ πατρὶ λέγει), οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα δοκεῖ μοι διδάσκων ὁ Κύριος τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι Πατέρα, μνήμην σοι ποιεῖσθαι τῆς ἀγαθῆς πατρίδος, ὡς ἂν ἐπιθυμίαν σφοδροτέραν τῶν καλῶν ἐμπούσας, ἐπιστήσειέ σε τῇ ὁδῷ τῇ πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα πάλιν ἐπαναγούσῃ.

<sup>5</sup> Plato *Theaetetus* 176A–B: διὸ καὶ πευρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκείσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι.

<sup>6</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2; PG 44, 1145A–B; ACW 18, 42: “Ὁδὸς δὲ ἢ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ἀνάγουσα, οὐδεμία τις ἐστὶν ἄλλη, εἰ μὴ φυγὴ καὶ ἀπόστασις τῶν περιγέγων κακῶν τῆς δὲ φυγῆς τῶν κακῶν ἐπίνοια, οὐκ ἄλλη μοῖ τις εἶναι δοχεῖ, πλὴν τῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὁμοιώσεως. Τὸ δὲ ὁμοιωθῆναι θεῶ, τὸ δίκαιόν τε καὶ ὄσιον καὶ ἀγαθὸν, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτά ἐστι γενέσθαι.

<sup>7</sup> See Merki 1952.

If anyone, as far as in him lies, clearly shows in himself the characteristics of these virtues, he will pass *automatically and without effort* from this earthly life to the life of Heaven. For *the distance between the Divine and the human is not a local one so as to need some mechanical device* by which this heavily weighted earthly flesh should migrate into the disembodied intelligible life.<sup>8</sup> [Italics mine]

Another important point to note is that the return of the soul to the ‘fatherland’, a distinctively Plotinian expression, is defined not as a spatial but rather as an intellectual movement. Gregory does not accept the necessity of any ‘mechanical device’ by which to direct the soul to the higher level of virtuous attainment. His emphasis on the intellectual dimension of the flight shows a close similarity to a treatise of Plotinus entitled ‘On the Beautiful’ (*Enneads* 1.6): after considering the emancipation from the passions (1.6.5), Plotinus raises the question, ‘what (τρόπος) must we do? How lies the path (μηχανή)?’<sup>9</sup> Following the Plotinian framework for grasping God with our ‘mind’, that is, calling upon ‘vision, which is to be waked within you, a vision (ὄψιν),’<sup>10</sup> Gregory confirms that the soul is brought to the fatherland ‘without effort’ because no means of bodily movement need to be arranged. The deliberate turning to God with the mind itself is only required to be brought to Heaven ‘automatically’.

No; if virtue has really been separated from evil, *it lies solely within the free choice of man to be there where his desire inclines him.* [Italics mine] Since, therefore, the choice of the good is *not followed by any labour*—for possession of the things that are chosen follows the act of choice—you are entitled to be in Heaven immediately, [Italics mine] because you have seized God with your mind. Now if, according to Ecclesiastes, *God is in Heaven*, and you, according to the Prophet, *adhere to God*, it follows necessarily that you should be where God is, because you are united to Him. Since then He has commanded in the prayer to call God Father. He tells you to do *nothing less than to become like to your Heavenly Father by a life that is worthy of God*, [Italics mine] as He bids us do more clearly elsewhere when He says: *Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2; PG 44, 1145B; ACW 18, 42: Ὡν εἴ τις, ὡς ἔστι δυνατόν, τοὺς χαρακτήρας ἐναργῶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ τυπώσειεν, ἀμογητὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον πρὸς τὸν οὐράνιον χώρον ἀπὸ τοῦ περιγείου μεταστήσεται βίου. Οὐ γὰρ τοπικὴ τοῦ θείου πρὸς τὸ ἀνθρώπινόν ἐστιν ἡ διάστασις, ὥστε τινὸς μηχανῆς τε ἡμῖν καὶ ἐπινοίας γενέσθαι χρεῖαν, τὸ βαρὺ τε καὶ ἐμδρυνθῆς καὶ γεῶδες τοῦτο σαρκίον πρὸς τὴν ἀσώματόν τε καὶ νοεράν διαγωγὴν μετοικίσειν.  
<sup>9</sup> See Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.8; Henry and Schwyzer, ed., 1, 115; MacKenna, trans., 62: Τίς οὖν ὁ τρόπος; Τίς μηχανή;

<sup>10</sup> See Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.8; Henry and Schwyzer, ed., 1, 116; MacKenna, trans., 63: οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι, ἣν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρωῶνται δὲ ὀλίγοι.

<sup>11</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2; PG 44, 1145B–C; ACW 18, 42–43; ἄλλα νοητῶς τῆς ἀρετῆς τοῦ κακοῦ

Thus, Gregory incorporates the ‘free choice of man’ into the flight of the soul. It lies within our power (ἐξέστω) whether we are where God is or exist among the evils of the world. It is noteworthy that Plotinus does not refer to the human will in the treatise (*Enn.* 1.6) where he tells us about the soul’s itinerary to the fatherland. Here, Gregory does not develop the concept of will and only briefly insists that the attainment of virtues depends on the faculty of free choice. However, it would be inappropriate not to observe that discussion about the will and its related terms, such as choice, voluntariness and freedom, is not entirely absent from the treatises of Plotinus.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, for Gregory, the concept of the will and the condition of the human being are closely interrelated, being in particular indispensable for considering the significance of human liberty and its ontological dynamics. Then, with regard to their descriptions of the flight of the soul, what is the most crucial point to be made, especially in Gregory, whose use of and indebtedness to Plotinus are characterised by both verbal correspondences and similarities of thought? The emphasis of the former is on willing (free choice) and of the latter on seeing (vision), but both Plotinus and Gregory regard the spiritual itinerary as being achieved without difficulty. Although Gregory does not exclude the possibility that no evil comes to subsistence outside of the human will, the repeated encouragement to the faithful based on the scriptural passages (Ecclesiastes and the Prophet) is clear. It is in this sense that Gregory’s optimistic affirmation on the return of the soul is to be appreciated.

#### AUGUSTINE: CONFESSIONS AND OTHER WRITINGS

Examples indicating how Augustine of Hippo evaluated the flight of the soul may be taken from the *Confessions* (397–401), as well as from other earlier writings, earlier and later, written during the period 386–417. In this section, I look first at the descriptions in both his early and late works, thereby showing a shift from the intellectual to the moral interpretation of the soul’s itinerary. Then, with

κεχωρισμένης, ἐν μόνῃ τῇ προαιρέσει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κεῖται, πρὸς ὅπερ ἂν ἐπικλυθεῖ τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ, ἐν ἐκείνῃ εἶναι. Ἐπεὶ οὖν οὐδείς ἔπεται πόνος ἐλέσθαι τὸ ἀγαθὸν (τῷ δὲ ἐλέσθαι καὶ τὸ τυχεῖν ἔπεται ὡς τις προεἴλετο), ἐξέστί σοι εὐθὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ εἶναι, τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ διάνοιᾳ λαδόντι. Εἰ γὰρ, καθὼς φησιν ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής, Ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, σὺ δὲ τῷ θεῷ, κατὰ τὸν Προφήτην προσεκολλήθης ἀνάγκη πᾶσα τὸν τῷ θεῷ συνημμένον ἐκεῖ εἶναι ὅπου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός. Προστάξας τοίνυν ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ λέγειν πρὸς ἑαυτοῦ τὸν θεόν, οὐδὲν ἕτερον, ἢ ὁμοιοῦσθαί σε τῇ θεοπραπέῃ πολιτεία τῷ οὐρανίῳ κελεῖει Πατρὶ, καθάπερ καὶ φανερώτερον ἐτέρωτι τὸ τοιοῦτον παρεγγυᾷ, λέγων Γίνεσθε τέλειοι, ὡς καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Plot. *Enn.* 6.8.1–6: ‘On the Voluntary and the Will’.

the focus on the passages found in the *Confessions*, I examine his approach to the soul's departure and the return to God.

In his earliest extant writings, referred to as the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*, Augustine's *Against the Academicians* is the first work, written during his retirement to a country house near Milan (386), in which he explicitly integrates the return of the soul to Heaven into his concern for 'our life, morality, and spirit'.

The spirit [*animus*] will return more safely to Heaven since it supposes that it will (a) overcome the dangers of all fallacious arguments; (b) triumph over the passions in returning to the region of its origin, so to speak, once truth has been apprehended; and (c) exercise its rule once it has been wedded to moderation in this fashion.<sup>13</sup>

Again, in the fourth Dialogue, *Soliloquies*, he gives further description of the flight of the soul. In the dialogue between Augustine and his own Reason, it is made explicit that 'there is not just one way to her [*scil. Wisdom*].'<sup>14</sup> By using the metaphorical language of the sun and the light, Reason suggests the possibility that each is able to grasp the Wisdom 'according to his soundness and firmness'. It then encourages Augustine to flee from sensible things.

[W]e need complete and perfect wings to fly to that light from this darkness. That light does not deign to reveal itself to those trapped in this prison, unless they are able to break out of the prison and destroy it, and escape to their own higher places.<sup>15</sup>

The bodily eye cannot see the sun 'unless it is healthy (*sanus*)'.<sup>16</sup> The soul is often deceived about its own state of health. As some scholars have pointed out, these interpretations of the soul's flight are expounded in the same language as that employed by Plotinus in his treatise (*Enn.* 1.6 'On the Beautiful'), in particular concerning the flight as an awakening of the power of seeing, along with the related imagery: the wing, the light and the sun. Augustine sets out a highly intellectual framework for the explanation found in the *Enneads* of Plotinus.

<sup>13</sup> Aug. *C. Acad.* 2.9.22; CCSL 29, 30; King, trans., 46: *qui [scil. animum] se superaturum inimicitias omnium fallaciarum et ueritate comprehensa quasi in regionem suae originis rediens triumphaturum de libidinibus atque ita temperantia uelut coniuge accepta regnaturum esse praesumit securior rediturus in caelum.*

<sup>14</sup> Aug. *Sol.* 1.13.23; CSEL 89, 35; Paffenroth, trans., 44: *non ad eam una via peruenitur.* See also his critical remarks in *Retract.* 1.4.3.

<sup>15</sup> Aug. *Sol.* 1.14.24; CSEL 89, 37; Paffenroth, trans., 46: *integris perfectisque opus est, ut ad illam lucem ab his tenebris euelemus, quae se ne ostendere quidem dignatur in hac cavea inclusis, nisi tales fuerint, ut ista uel effracta uel dissolue possint in auras sues evadere.*

<sup>16</sup> Aug. *Sol.* 1.14.25; CSEL 89, 37; Paffenroth, trans., 46–47: *nisi sanus.*

Around ten years later, Augustine started writing *On Christian Teaching*, in which he calls attention to the purification of the mind, thus relating the journey towards the fatherland. Affirming the unchangeable truth that the unchangeably wise life is to be preferred to that which is changeable, he indicates the different types of people: those who do not see it are ‘like a blind man in the sun, who cannot be helped by the brightness of such a clear and powerful light shining into his eyes’<sup>17</sup> and those who see but escape from the truth, lose the sharpness and strength of their mind by the ‘habit of living in the shadows cast by the flesh’.<sup>18</sup> They are ‘as it were, blown away from their homeland by the adverse winds of their own perverted characters’.<sup>19</sup> Augustine admonishes the reader to purify their minds in order to ‘enjoy to the full that truth which lives unchangeably.’<sup>20</sup> A mostly intellectual interpretation of the flight is presented here, on the Plotinian pattern in *Enneads* (1.6).

Let us consider this process of cleansing as a trek, or a voyage, to our homeland; though progress towards the one who is ever present is not made through space, but through goodness of purpose and character.<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that he concedes the existence of people who, regardless of their spiritual orientation, deliberately abandon the truth: they are in pursuit of the things that are ‘secondary and inferior to whatever they admit to be superior and more outstanding’.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, they deviate from a rational scheme of behaviour.

The sporadic references to the flight of the soul are also to be found in the relatively late works. For instance, the exposition of Psalm 149, probably preached in 404,<sup>23</sup> explicating the second verse of Psalm 149 and focusing on the eternal life of the ‘true Zion’, speaks about the fatherland to be approached

<sup>17</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.9.9; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 21: *quasi caecus in sole, cui nihil prodest ipsis locis oculorum eius tam clarae ac praesentis lucis fulgor infusus.*

<sup>18</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.9.9; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 21: *consuetudine umbrarum carnalium.*

<sup>19</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.9.9; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 21: *quasi contrariis flatibus ab ipsa patria repercuntuntur.*

<sup>20</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.10.10; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 21: *illa veritate perfruendum sit quae incommutabiliter vivit.*

<sup>21</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.10.10; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 23: *Quam purgationem quasi ambulationem quamdam et quasi navigationem ad patriam esse arbitremur. Non enim ad eum qui ubique praesens est locis movemur, sed bono studio bonisque moribus.*

<sup>22</sup> Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 1.9.9; CSEL 80, 13; Green, trans., 21: *posteriora atque inferiora sectantes quam illud quod esse melius atque praestantius confitentur.*

<sup>23</sup> See Hombert 2000, 368. See also Dolbeau, ed. 2009, 508.

‘not by swift feet but by love’.<sup>24</sup> Augustine clarifies the means of travel by which people should flee to their home.

Such travelers look not for ships but for wings; let them seize the twin wings of charity. What are charity’s paired wings? Love of God and love of our neighbor.<sup>25</sup>

It is the non-intellectual way of understanding that he defines as an appropriate approach to the spiritual itinerary of the soul to God. This is the same with the interpretation offered in Book 9 of *City of God*, which was written by 417. Here, Augustine mentions Plotinus by name and combines passages from *Enneads* I.6.8 (‘On the Beautiful’) and I.2.8 (‘On Virtues’) as follows;

What has become of that saying of Plotinus, ‘We must flee to our beloved country. There the Father is, and there is everything. Where shall we take ship? How can we flee? By becoming like God.’ If man comes near to God in proportion as he grows more like him, then unlikeness to God is the only separation from him, and the soul of man is estranged from that immaterial, eternal and unchangeable being in proportion as it craves for things that are temporal and changeable.<sup>26</sup>

He emphasises that human beings require a mediator not like a demon but like Christ, who can ‘render us truly divine assistance for our purification and liberation’.<sup>27</sup> As regards his concern for the mediator, it is worth noting that ‘the man Christ Jesus’ has remained on the highest level, ‘not by spatial remoteness from us’.<sup>28</sup> This expression is the same as that used in *On Christian Teaching*. Another important expression of the mode of travel is found in a paraphrase from the treatises of Plotinus. Augustine seems to accept the Plotinian definition of the attainment of the blessed life: it consists in ‘becoming like God’.

I shall turn my attention to the passages in the first and eighth books of *Confessions*. In book eight, before being involved in the ‘*tolle lege*’ incident in a Milanese garden, Augustine continued his struggle against the fragmented state

<sup>24</sup> Aug. *En. Ps.* 149.5; CSEL 95/5, 276; WSA 3/20, 496: *dilectione, non pedibus corporis.*

<sup>25</sup> Aug. *En. Ps.* 149.5; CSEL 95/5, 276; WSA 3/20, 496: *non quaerant naves, sed pennas; duas alas caritatis apprehendant. Quae sunt duae alae caritatis? Dilectio dei et proximi.*

<sup>26</sup> Aug. *Ciu. dei* 9.17; CCSL 47, 265–66; Bettenson, trans., 364: *Vbi est illud Plotini, ubi ait: « Fugendum est igitur ad carissimam patriam, et ibi pater, et ibi omnia. Quae igitur, inquit, classis aut fuga? Similem Deo fieri. » Si ergo deo quanto similior, tanto fit quisque propinquior: nulla est ab illo alia longinquitas quam eius dissimilitudo. Incorporali uero illi aeterno et incommutabili tanto est anima hominis dissimilior, quanto rerum temporalium mutabiliumque cupidior.*

<sup>27</sup> Aug. *Ciu. dei* 9.17; CCSL 47, 266; Bettenson, trans., 364: *mundandis liberandisque nobis uere diuinum praebeat adiutorium.*

<sup>28</sup> Aug. *Ciu. dei* 9.17; CCSL 47, 266; Bettenson, trans., 364: *non locorum distantia.*



of his will. It has been suggested by some scholars that, in the story of his internal conflict, Augustine speaks about the flight of the soul from the Plotinian point of view.

By neither by ship nor chariot nor on foot had I progressed any nearer to it [*scil.* Heaven] than I had gone from the house to the place where we were sitting. To progress towards it—indeed, to attain it—was nothing other than the will to progress, but with a will that was strong and whole throughout;<sup>29</sup>

As had been mentioned in his earlier writings, he follows closely the views and language expressed in a treatise of Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.6). However, in contrast to Plotinus' stress on the power of seeing, let us note Augustine's view on what he defines as a faculty for arrival at the final destination, a faculty that he regards as indispensable to making this journey, that is, a united will 'that was strong and whole throughout'. We also find the description of the flight of the soul in the first book of the *Confessions*, in which the prodigal parable in the gospel of Luke is interpreted from the Plotinian point of view.

The road that leads us from you and back to you again is not one that we can measure, or tread with our feet. The younger son in your story did not need horses or chariots or ships when he set out to squander his wealth in a far country, he did not grow wings and fly off in view of all, or go striding on his way. But you, his father, who had been kind in giving him his inheritance when he set out, were kinder still when he came home empty-handed. The far country into which he departed was a state of mind, ruled by lusts, full of darkness, and cut off from your face.<sup>30</sup>

This interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son lies in fact at the heart of Augustine's view of the flight of the soul. Although he ostensibly adapted the passage of Plotinus after he had heard Ambrose's sermon *De Isaac uel anima*, in around 386, he does not share their view in two respects. While Plotinus considers the return from an odyssey to be a symbol of the soul's wandering, Augustine omits the reference to this Homeric imagery and substitutes the

<sup>29</sup> Aug. *Conf.* 8.8.19; BA 14, 48; Burton, trans., 176: *et non illuc ibatur nauibus aut quadrigis aut pedibus, quantum saltem de domo in eum locum ieram, ubi sedebamus. nam non solum ire uerum etiam peruenire illuc nihil erat aliud quam uelle ire, sed uelle fortiter et integre, [...].*

<sup>30</sup> Aug. *Conf.* 1.18.28; BA 13, 322.324; Burton, trans., 24: *non enim pedibus aut spatiis locorum itur abs te aut reditur ad te, aut uero filius ille tuus minor equos uel currus uel naves quaesiuit aut auolauit pinna uisibili aut moto poplite iter egit, ut in longinqua regione uiuens prodige dissiparet quod dederas proficiscenti dulcis pater, quia dederas, et egeno redeunti dulcior: in affectu ergo libidinoso, id enim est tenebroso atque id est longe a uultu tuo.*

prodigal son for Odysseus. He also exchanges the Plotinian (and Ambrosian) focus on vision for his consistent concern with the will. These points seem to be understood as his contributions to the pagan framework for the flight of the soul.

## CONCLUSION

While mentioning the name of Plotinus only in an exceptional case, Augustine repeatedly and clearly adapts passages from the *Enneads*, especially the treatise 'On the Beautiful', to the flight of the soul. There is agreement among scholars that Augustine's treatment was significantly affected by Plotinus, although further investigation is required to determine which passages. Particularly in his early works, it is clear that Augustine defines the flight as an awakening of the inner vision, thereby using the intellectual approach taken in the *Enneads*. His concern for the purification of the mind is in fact replaced by the attention to the bifurcation of the human will. However, along with the development of Augustine's view of the soul's flight, there remain several similarities in terminology. This is the same with the influence of Plotinus on Gregory's exposition of the Lord's Prayer. In his view of the soul's return to the fatherland, Gregory defines the final step as that of 'becoming like God' based on a treatise of Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.2). As regards the focus on the intellectual mode of the flight, his explicit indebtedness to another treatise (*Enneads* 1.6) is acknowledged. Gregory was also primarily affected by the Plotinian theme of flight in his treatises.

The question of how far Augustine was influenced by Gregory in his view of the flight of the soul is one that has been difficult to determine. The basis for our approach to the possibility of Gregory's influence on Augustine is the fact that both Gregory and Augustine combine the ancient story of the soul's wandering with the prodigal parable. For Gregory, it seems appropriate that this parable is connected with his interpretation of the prayer. Both imply the 'fatherland' and the soul's return to God. Thus, he brings together the earthly father and the heavenly father. In *Confessions*, where Augustine inserts the Lucan parable into the Plotinian view of the soul's flight, the prodigal son appears abruptly and his father is absent. His father is merged with the heavenly father whose kindness and generosity are clearly confirmed. It seems likely that Augustine has in mind the Gregorian way of uniting the two fathers. Another important point to consider is the similarity of expressions given by Gregory and Augustine. With regard to the departure and the return of the soul, Augustine refers to spatial

distances: ‘the road [...] is not one that we can measure’.<sup>31</sup> While Plotinus does not offer any equivalent to the phrase, we see the similar language in the passage of Gregory: ‘local one’.<sup>32</sup> It is noteworthy that, again in his later work, Augustine states that the mediator has remained on the high, ‘not by spatial remoteness’.<sup>33</sup> This expression is also very similar to that of Gregory. In relation to several slight similarities, such as the repetition of the intensifying phrase both in Augustine’s *Confessions*: ‘*nihil erat aliud quam*’<sup>34</sup> and in Gregory’s *De oratione dominica*: ‘*οὐδεμία τις ἐστὶν ἄλλη εἰ μὴ*’,<sup>35</sup> and the absence of the ‘difficulty’ in Gregory’s *De oratione dominica*: ‘*πόνος*’,<sup>36</sup> further investigation is needed.

It may be that, before engaging in his *Confessions*, Augustine was affected in some way by Gregory’s interpretation of the flight of the soul and the prodigal parable. It is also very likely that, in *De sermone domini in monte* (393), the exegetical legacy (including Gregory’s *De beatitudinibus*, probably written before 378) lies behind Augustine’s understanding of the Matthaean beatitudes.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps, before his ordination into the priesthood in 391, he knew some passages from *De oratione dominica*. Further investigation into some undetermined sources of Augustine’s exposition of the flight of the soul is required, however.

<sup>31</sup> Aug. *Conf.* 1.18.28: *spatiis locorum*. See n. 30 above.

<sup>32</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2: *τοπικὴ διάστασις*. See n. 8 above.

<sup>33</sup> Aug. *Ciu. dei* 9.17: *locorum distantia*. See n. 28 above.

<sup>34</sup> Aug. *Conf.* 8.8.19. See n. 29 above.

<sup>35</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2. See n. 6 above.

<sup>36</sup> Gr. Nyss. *Or. dom.* 2. See n. 11 above.

<sup>37</sup> See Kamimura 2015.