

# **Human Sin and the Will in Patristic Thought: Augustine and Clement against the Montanists**

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## **Introduction**

Montanism was a short-lived movement of “Spirit-centered” revelation that flourished in Asia Minor and North Africa in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. It became famous because the great patristic writer Tertullian, was a follower. Ultimately, the church condemned the movement and it was soon stamped out.

The martyrdom of Perpetua was a central pillar in this movement. Her “martyrdom” contains several visions. These are mystical visions that are not all that different from the basic “ecstatic” vision of the female prophets. These visions have created a literature holding that Perpetua was a martyr for Montanism as much as Orthodox Christianity. This is a fairly weak argument, since the vision she has (or at least the main one) will eventually become a popular monastic icon. Perpetua's martyrdom was purely Orthodox, and her visions do not make her a prophetess within the Montanist school.

Perpetua was a Christian woman of aristocratic rank that was martyred for the faith around the same time the Montanist heresy developed. The main issue is that, since Perpetua is a fairly popular saint in both East and West, her possible association with that heresy is problematic. The fact that Tertullian himself was a strong devotee of Perpetua's veneration has raised suspicions about her loyalties (Farina, 2007).

Montanism can be reduced to four explicit ideas:

First, the rejection of “rationalized” doctrine became a major idea. The movement was based on the immediate “possession” of the devotee by the Holy Spirit. There was no mediation in this doctrine and revelation. This was an attempt to recreate the Garden of Eden, where a concept-less contemplation of God existed.

Second, the concept of the priesthood was implicitly condemned, since the ecstatic revelation was available to anyone. These revelations were of God directly, and hence, the mediation of the episcopate was irrelevant. Those who are “possessed” by the Spirit are more authentic than the local bishop, whose relation to God is mediated.

Third, group believe that, very soon, the Heavenly Jerusalem was to descend upon the early Jerusalem. This would be, so to speak, the creation of utopia, a world based exclusively on the reign of Christ, ruling directly. The first three doctrinal marks all stress the rejection of intermediate concepts such as words, logical rigor or culture. Icons, liturgies and all the “sacramentals” are of this nature. Montanism then would have meant the death of Christian culture before it even had a chance to develop. It was a very dangerous doctrine for this reason.

Finally, the movement was marked by a severe asceticism that went far beyond the traditional Christian idea at the time. Their rigor is what attracted the severe Tertullian in the first place (cf Schaff, sec 111). To an extent, the purification of the self was needed to serve as a pure vessel for grace, that which serves as the “projection” of the revelation. Of course, the seer in this view still has to use words and explain these revelations in a logical way. This is consistent so long as it is only the origin of truth that matters rather than its expression.

In the second century, one of the Roman persecutions of the church came to pass.

Perpetua was martyred at this time. David Wright summarizes the concepts here:

Their claim to be the organs of the Spirit's instructions to the church involved an imperious summons to recognition and obedience which bishops could not tolerate in a new convert and two women companions. The church of the 170's and 180's had reached a sensitive, even prickly, stage in its development. It was emerging from the confusions of the Gnostic crisis and recovering from the harsh confrontation with Marcion, but was still feeling after a clear consensus on the terms of its apostolic charter. (Wright, 1976: 20)

There can be no question that the Montanist explosion was problematic. Doctrine is something painstakingly arrived at. Usually, the existence of a disruptive heresy requires the church to both condemn the heresy and lay out the problems with it. In so doing, the church develops her doctrinal deposit. Montanism was harmful to that legitimate purpose of the church.

The main issue of Montanism was nothing less than the every nature of the church. The main problem was the immediacy of the revelation. The whole point of the church was to protect and define doctrine as problems and heresies arise. These doctrines need to be based on the canonical Bible, the writings of the saints, the tradition of the people and the universal practice of the whole church. Taken together, these are what the father's refer to when they use the term "Scriptures" or "Divine Writings." Only when it is in accordance with Scripture can a doctrine be accepted as true. The concept of immediate revelation was too subjective. There was no way to tell if a good or evil spirit had taken control of the person. There is no way to tell whether or not the person's own intimation was at the root of the vision, or if imagination was "adding" detail to the original inspiration. These, among others, are the primary reasons the movement was condemned.

Phillip Schaff, writing on the mentality of the movement, writes that "Tertullian says, that the administration of the Paraclete consists only in the reform of discipline, in deeper understanding of the Scriptures, and in effort after higher perfection; that it has the same faith, the same God, the same Christ, and the same sacraments with the Catholics" (sec 111). This concept just adds to the problem. If Tertullian, whose theological brilliance was never denied, thought that these prophets could "deepen" our understanding of scripture and doctrine, then any emotional outburst would have to be at least taken seriously as something revelatory. This implies that any of these outbursts, at least potentially, have the identical theological authority as the written Scriptures.

The account of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas was written roughly in the first few years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The main problem is that it is loaded with powerful and detailed visions. This is a problem largely because visions, of themselves, do not prove doctrinal correctness or even clarity. The main one, experienced by Perpetua herself, goes like this:

I beheld a ladder of bronze, marvelously great, reaching up to heaven; and it was narrow, so that not more than one might go up at one time. And in the sides of the ladder were planted all manner of things of iron. There were swords there, spears, hooks, and knives; so that if any that went up took not good heed or looked not upward, he would be torn and his flesh cling to the iron. And there was right at the ladder's foot a serpent lying, marvelously great, which lay in wait for those that would go up, and frightened them that they might not go up (Passion, 203).

The meaning of the vision is fairly clear. Even more, the vision itself, in one variation or another, is actually found in other vita of the saints, and is especially monastic. The concept is that the ladder is our life, our mission. We are to constantly move “upward,” or to become more spiritual. The latter is a metaphor for our struggle and climb upward to a higher life. This became the monastic standard of St. John of the Ladder, who first took the ladder of Jacob and rendered it close to ancient monastic life. While it is true that this became the standard much later, it was in part due to these saintly visions that it eventually took its popularity.

In addition, the ladder also represents the incarnation. Christ becoming man, taking flesh from Mary, is a link between earth and heaven. The ladder is not just something we climb, but it “connects” one area to another. The ladder is both Christ and Mary. It is the connection of earth and heaven. In the famed icon “Unburnt Bush” Mary the Theotokos (Mother of God) is holding the ladder of Jacob. This icon is of ancient provenance, and connects the idea of the Ladder to the incarnation of Mary (Icon Reader, 2010).

The ladder envisaged by Perpetua is not identical to the famed “Ladder of Divine Ascent” icon so popular among monastics. It is, however, close enough. The “iron” objects found all over the ladder are snares. These are different passions and sins that await to ensnare those who are not careful. In the icon, there are no iron hooks, but instead, demons are “dragging” those going up the ladder down from it. These demons have the same purpose as the ladder vision in Perpetua's martyrdom. The demons in the icon are using the same weapons that Perpetua was seeing in the vision. Spears, hooks and arrows are used to take the monk from the ladder and drag him (at least) back to earth. The visions are almost identical.

Other visions follow. These include Perpetua beholding her long deceased brother, and visions of ministering angels. These additional visions seem far more subjective and personal and hence, do not have the same doctrinal significance. These do, however, bring the reader to accept the holiness of this woman overall.

### **The Orthodox Church against Montanism**

It is a common claim to hold that the Montanist idea was a “practical” approach to Christianity, while the institutional church was its more theoretical, doctrinal branch. There is little evidence that the Montanists held that the institutional church was irrelevant. Much later proto-pentecostal groups have held just that. However, the Montanist group only implied that prophecy was the main organ of revelation. Again, Wright can clarify things:

In a nutshell, the New Prophecy was fanatical rather than heretical. By the style of their prophecy, the eccentricity of their ascetic demands, their pique at the catholic bishops' repudiation of their charismata and perhaps by facets of their personal demeanor and predominance, the prophetic trio displayed an overbearing self-importance of which bishops in the catholic church of that day could hardly fail to take notice (Wright, 1976: 19).

This is probably the most reasonable approach. There has never been a time in church history where this kind of prophecy has not been important. It is held in suspicion because of its immediate nature. Some authors, such as Christine Trevett, have argued that this “new prophecy” was very feminine. The fact that it was very female in its make up might be interpreted as a feminine reaction to the male hierarchy.

The case might just as easily be that the female is very immediate and emotional, the male, mediate and rational. This is not a problem in itself, since both kinds of revelation and doctrinal sources are complimentary. The main problem with Montanism was that this revelation was the truly, and it heralded the reign of the Holy Spirit in earth through Christ in the utopia the end of the world will usher in.

Even Tertullian's own involvement did not harm his reputation. Tertullian is cited by Orthodox authors in many occasions. His Montanism (and hence his fall into heresy late in life) has not diminished his authority. Wright's argument is that this movement was "fanatical rather than heretical." As the church became more of an institution, it stands to reason that a reaction would occur – a reaction that stresses emotional, immediate revelation to supplement, if not replace, the rationalized doctrine of the monasteries, synods and bishops (Trivett, 1996).

Angus Stewart writes on this movement:

Three major strands of "Christian" enthusiasm are found in it: an imminent *parousia*, a pure church ideal and continuing, extraordinary, spiritual gifts. Of these three, it is the last that particularly concerns us, for it has a striking contemporary manifestation in modern Pentecostalism/charismaticism. . . In their twisting of these Scriptures, both the New Prophecy and Pentecostalism attack the sufficiency of Scripture, the once-for-all character of Pentecost and the fullness of Christ.

Writing from a Protestant point of view stressing the primary of Scripture, Stewart summarizes the basic problems with the view. Tertullian, in his own writings, speaks of the women he knows in Africa that are capable of all manner of miracles and healings based on their ecstatic visitations by the Spirit. Hence, there are two separate lines of argument against this New Prophecy.

First, that the church as an institutional structure is vitiated by these movements. It is fashionable to condemn the "official" or "bureaucratic" church as if it is something excessively formal and rational. However, true doctrine can only be maintained in such an institutional body. Without it, doctrine will change as rapidly as man's desires. If true doctrine is to be discovered, uncovered and protected, some kind of institutional structure is absolutely necessary for it. This kind of prophesy, however, can render the episcopacy irrelevant, since one need not listen to the local bishop of a seer is present in your midst. There can be no more strong source of doctrine than the Holy Spirit itself.

Second, that the bible is violated as the sole foundation of faith. For the same reasons as mentioned above, the existence of such "seers" render the scriptures irrelevant. If there is a seer in your midst, then you need not read the bible at all, since the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit is right in front of you.

These arguments are similar to each other. They are both derived from the same concept; there is true doctrine. It is found in Scripture and the hierarchy of the church descended from the apostles. Montanism eliminates these authorities and places the random seers in charge of doctrine. Even if one were to claim that these seers are supplemental to other forms of doctrine (and this kind of direct revelation is not unknown in Orthodox church history), there is still the danger that the order in the church will be violated by the constant interjection of "direct revelation" by the local seer. The point is that these seers, at the basis of Montanism and all related movements, create a chaos in the church that is unacceptable. The church is meant to

manifest the truth of Christ and to protect the people from heretics and outsiders. Yet, this kind of prophesy is harmful, especially since it holds that the world will soon end. If this is true, then the institutional structure of the church is totally irrelevant since, very soon, Christ and the Spirit will reign among us directly.

Montanism was not a “protest” against moral laxity in the church; “male domination”; “hierarchy” or any number of other fashionable theories pushed in academia. It was too revolutionary for that. Tertullian considered the era of the Montanists the final era of revelation where, finally, the doctrines of the apostles will be fully understood in the ecstatic prophesies of the women. This was not a protest movement, but another religion entirely.

### **Montanism and the Will in St. Clement of Alexandria (150-215)**

The ground for Montanism – in part – is found in the unsatisfactory world of the intellect. At any time, numerous competing theories, all quite coherent, co-exist and fight it out for the public mind. To stress private, ecstatic revelation is to eliminate all that and to give God the power over both intellect and will. It places the person in total submission to the divine will as expressed in these overwhelming Spirit-based ejaculations.

Another ground was the constant sinful drives of human nature. Always driven from one passion to another, the intellect can never be trusted. If the will is not to be, than the intellect cannot be either. There is a certain appeal in the total surrender of the will and the refusal to take part in secular debates on epistemology. This, and the elimination of the need for actual knowledge, made this doctrine popular.

One problem out of many with this doctrine is the nagging question of freedom. The proof of the soul and its spiritual origin and destiny is freedom. If truth comes from the surrender of this freedom, than what is its purpose? The ability, albeit a difficult one, to abstract from one's surroundings and make decisions based on rational, logical thought proves that the soul of man is not only immaterial, and thus, can only be satisfied with equally immaterial objects.

Freedom is not an object; it is a means to an object. Freedom can lead to the will demanding the material idols so central to modernity. In so doing, the soul loses its freedom as it conforms itself to these idols. Material things are not free, they are determined solely by cause and effect. Only spiritual things can be free. It might also demand the total rejection of reason and the surrender of itself to these revelations.

By stressing the inspiration of the third person of the trinity, freedom was demoted. There was no correspondence with reality, the utterance was the reality and all external things needed to conform to it. This was its greatest error. For example, Prisca claimed that Christ appeared to her in the person of a woman. There is no doctrinal or rational reason for this, thus it led to the increasingly skeptical attitude of the church institutionally.

Only a freedom “aimed” at the life of the divine can actually remain free. Montanism took this to its final conclusion. If the will is to be rejected, then reason must be so as well. However, this is a hasty rejection of human nature in favor of easy, quick and chaotic answers from “seers.” The existence of reason and the free will it generates suggests that Montanism is an error, especially if these revelations are the primary source of truth. In Book III of *The Instructor*, St. Clement writes:

Now, God alone is in need of nothing, and rejoices most when He sees us bright with the ornament of intelligence; and then, too, rejoices in him who is arrayed in

chastity, the sacred stole of the body. Since then the soul consists of three divisions; the intellect, which is called the reasoning faculty, is the inner man, which is the ruler of this man that is seen. And that one, in another respect, God guides. But the irascible part, being brutal, dwells near to insanity. And appetite, which is the third department, is many-shaped above Proteus, the varying sea-god, who changed himself now into one shape, now into another; and it allures to adulteries, to licentiousness, to seductions.

The objects of the lower order are those that are individual. Objects existing apart from any context, provoking the lusts of that part of the soul. They are false in the sense that they can never satisfy man, since they always change and are never the same. They never satisfy. Only the world of the Forms, the true knowledge of God, can satisfy man's desire for happiness and stability. He says again:

Passions break out, pleasures overflow; beauty fades, and falls quicker than the leaf on the ground, when the amorous storms of lust blow on it before the coming of autumn, and is withered by destruction. For lust becomes and fabricates all things, and wishes to cheat, so as to conceal the man. But that man with whom the Word dwells does not alter himself, does not get himself up: he has the form which is of the Word; he is made like to God; he is beautiful; he does not ornament himself: his is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills. Heraclitus, then, rightly said, "Men are gods, and gods are men."

The sacrality of the human soul is precisely this ability to abstract. This ability, however, is not arbitrary, but is a means to a realm of spirit, freedom and hence, truth. Abstractions and universals are not the same. Abstractions can be "empty" generalizations, but they can also be gateways into the realm of the spirit. Man needs God and must rely totally on him. The Montanists took this to an extreme. The world and the flesh, the domain of demons, seeks to ensnare men through the vivid allurements of the world: these allurements are images, and they are false, or, more accurately, only partially true. Material things are good, but only within a spiritual order. Matter, in our imperfect life, cannot be spiritualized, but it can be ordered by the spirit to serve it.

The human soul is drawn to the lower things of the world. Man, facing death, seeks those things that will either prolong life or enhance it. Christ defeated death by uniting the Form of humanity with divinity. Only when this is accomplished can the individual soul hope for freedom, but it can only come through grace. Grace is what creates faith. Faith, a word that has lost all of its original meaning, is the relationship of the person to anything that is above and beyond the changing world and its idols is not natural to man, it is supernatural and the product of God.

The ascetic life serves one purpose: to habituate the soul to disdain material things in the interest of the spiritual. Since this is not natural to man, it takes a tremendous amount of work to perfect. The saints have come closest to spiritualizing matter by ordering both interior desires and the outside world by spirit. Autonomy is the result. Autonomy is the condition of the will where it is not determined by any material interest. A will so dominated cannot in any useful way be called free. Once material things are put in place, then the will, guided by the spirit, can be

said to be free. This is the summation of the virtues: they exist to “build” the freedom of the will.

On the other hand, the rigorism of the Montanists eliminated the free will from human thought. Matter was rejected and prophesy became the only reality. Since anything in the Scriptures can be altered by this utterance, it was inherently relative and unstable.

Freedom is easily destroyed through the world. St. Clement writes,

Luxury has deranged all things; it has disgraced man. A luxurious niceness seeks everything, attempts everything, forces everything, coerces nature. Men play the part of women, and women that of men, contrary to nature; women are at once wives and husbands: no passage is closed against libidinousness; and their promiscuous lechery is a public institution, and luxury is domesticated. O miserable spectacle! horrible conduct! Such are the trophies of your social licentiousness which are exhibited: the evidence of these deeds are the prostitutes. Alas for such wickedness! Besides, the wretches know not how many tragedies the uncertainty of intercourse produces. For fathers, unmindful of children of theirs that have been exposed, often without their knowledge, have intercourse with a son that has debauched himself, and daughters that are prostitutes; and license in lust shows them to be the men that have begotten them (Book III, *The Instructor*).

This is shockingly modern in its implications. Pleasure and prosperity deaden the spiritual sense and distort the will. Man was meant for union with God. Trying to become “one” with the earth, other people, institutions or media images is possible, but never totally satisfying. Each of these idols is attached to a specific human vice. Human vices are precisely this constant, sub-rational drive to stay alive, to gain power or to, most especially, dominate others. These objects, these idols, have no reality; they are here today, gone tomorrow. The man who attaches himself to them will share the same fate. Man is what he loves. He writes in Book II of *The Instructor*:

Some men, in truth, live that they may eat, as the irrational creatures, “whose life is their belly, and nothing else.” But the Instructor enjoins us to eat that we may live. For neither is food our business, nor is pleasure our aim; but both are on account of our life here, which the Word is training up to immortality. Wherefore also there is discrimination to be employed in reference to food. And it is to be simple, truly plain, suiting precisely simple and artless children – as ministering to life, not to luxury. And the life to which it conduces consists of two things – health and strength; to which plainness of fare is most suitable, being conducive both to digestion and lightness of body, from which come growth, and health, and right strength, not strength that is wrong or dangerous and wretched, as is that of athletes produced by compulsory feeding.

Like any good Platonist, St. Clement saw man's soul as divided: reason, will and spirit. These correspond to objects of knowledge. Yet, Plato, Justin Martyr and St. Clement all realize that the rational and spiritual elements of the soul must cooperate to force authority and order on chaos. This order is identical to “being saved,” and it is both a product of the ascetic life and grace working together.

Reason came under attack in the Montanist school because the primary source of new

revelation was the prophetic utterance. These became axioms of the theology rather than rational cognition – these became the foundation for cognition. To argue that the destruction of freedom through sin thus requires the radical bypassing of all rational functions is disproportionate. In other words, the Montanists claim that man is fallen badly, thus only immediate revelation can bring man to truth. This does not follow.

St. Clement was a contemporary of the Montanist movement. He deals with the Montanist idea in Book IV of his *Stromata* or *Miscellanies* this way:

But the variety of disposition arises from inordinate affection to material things. And for this reason, as they appear to me, to have called night *Euphrone*; since then the soul, released from the perceptions of sense, turns in on itself, and has a truer hold of intelligence (*Fronhsis*). Wherefore the mysteries are for the most part celebrated by night, indicating the withdrawal of the soul from the body, which takes place by night. “Let us not then sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as an helmet the hope of salvation.” And as to what, again, they say of sleep, the very same things are to be understood of death. For each exhibits the departure of the soul, the one more, the other less; as we may also get this in Heraclitus: “Man touches night in himself, when dead and his light quenched; and alive, when he sleeps he touches the dead; and awake, when he shuts his eyes, he touches the sleeper.”

Why is it impossible that the revelations of any gifted “seer” be of this sort? Knowledge comes in at least two forms: the knowledge of matter and the knowledge of spirit. The former is the realm of the sciences, the latter that of philosophy and theology. Going beyond the knowledge of matter into theoretical exercises in human origins and destinies is a parody of science. Modern science seeks to dominate all its sees: everything from ethics to sex to God allegedly comes under the domain of science.

Not only is that merely an expression of corporate self-interest, but it is fraud: the scientific method is a practical form of knowledge that has the purpose of “smoothing” the relation between human life and the material world. It has no other function. The life of the spirit is outside the domain of science because it is not subject to cause and effect. If it is not so determined, then it cannot come under the domain of science. The assertion that “all is matter” or that “all is cause and effect” are non-scientific statements. If the positivist method were to be used consistently, such statements would be rejected as nonsense, since they cannot be proven by the scientific method that assumes they are true.

The simple concept here is that science cannot argue for first principles that it assumes as it does its work. Science is dependent on other disciplines. Yet, because of the immense wealth and influence of the scientific establishment, such problems have been fairly easy to brush aside. There is always an abyss between science and the scientific establishment. The attempt to claim that the latter is identical to the former is the height of intellectual dishonesty. Montanism claimed the knowledge of divine things could only be immediate, never mediated through words or concepts. In Book VI of the *Miscellanies* he writes on knowledge:

Our knowledge, and our spiritual garden, is the Savior Himself; into whom we

are planted, being transferred and transplanted, from our old life, into the good land. And transplanting contributes to fruitfulness. The Lord, then, into whom we have been transplanted, is the Light and the true Knowledge. Now knowledge is otherwise spoken of in a twofold sense: that, commonly so called, which appears in all men (similarly also comprehension and apprehension), universally, in the knowledge of individual objects; in which not only the rational powers, but equally the irrational [or non-rational--MRJ], share, which I would never term knowledge, inasmuch as the apprehension of things through the senses comes naturally. But that which par excellence is termed knowledge, bears the impress of judgment and reason, in the exercise of which there will be rational cognitions alone, applying purely to objects of thought, and resulting from the bare energy of the soul.

This is a vehement rejection of any of the many contemporary sects all claiming some immediate, ecstatic or secret knowledge irreducible to reason. The end of man on earth is contemplation. St. Clement argues that the energies of the soul are reason that takes the unknown (that is, sense data) and applies concepts to it, bringing it under Forms. This, of course, is not some detached dreaming about Forms. It is the embodiment of autonomy in the world of matter; it is the domain of Logos. Knowledge only manifests itself through action. Knowledge is known only by its "fruit," or a specific way of life.

For the Montanists, matter was irrelevant. Since Jesus was coming soon, the material world and its laws had no interest for them. The nature of reality was insignificant due to the individualism of the movement and the immanent coming of God. Doctrine really revolved around the ecstatic cult devoted to the immediate visions of the seer.

Living for passions, on the other hand, is the "sinking" of the soul into the realm of cause and effect. It is not an act, but the origin of acts. It is the life of secularism, or paganism, its more ancient name. Sin is in our own self-understanding. It is a human life pursuing that which is fleeting. Truth is autonomy, and autonomy is the presence of Logos in nature, that is, those truly natural forces that do not come under the domain of natural science because they are not subject to determination. Repentance is action: it is the constant desire and struggle to place the human will on the same "plane" as Logos, that is, the spirit of Freedom inherent in the fallen material world of cause and effect. Knowledge is Formal or it is nothing.

The social consequences of this approach to the world are profound. Like nearly all patristic writers, St. Clement sees nominalism as the greatest of evils, it is the dispersal of thought into chaos. Montanism rejected knowledge in general, since only immediate illumination mattered for doctrine. Otherwise, the external world was unimportant. Nominalism is inherently attached to the ethics of individualism and self-glorification through acquisition. Realism derives from the truth, a truth shared by moderns like Rousseau, Hegel and Bosanquet, that reality is made up of "communities," not individuals. Montanism was individualistic. An individual object in nature is absurd. Objects, as individuals, derive from the community of forces in an ecosystem that create and sustain it. Here can Logos, or the very principle of such organic work, be seen, albeit dimly. The forms of Plato and the world of Realism in general has a social origin: the abstraction of the individual is not self-sufficient; only the community is. For the visions of Montanism, no community is needed. It was radically egocentric and outside any regulative institution. It was not a matter of being accepted after a process of discussion, but it was accepted because it was the utterance of a "purified saint."

The larger the unit (so long as its content is concrete) the more self-sufficient and hence, the more real. Realism derives from this clear and almost obvious conclusion. Nominalism, at least in its modern form, is a deliberate imposition on organic social reality that seeks to “liberate” the will from the “confines” of the family and community. In the same way, ecstatic ideologies seek to “liberate” the church from institutions. This is somewhat akin to saying that a certain philosophical view wants to “liberate” the flower from the “shackles” of the soil.

The regulation of material things is an object of reason. It is hard to see a more Platonic concept in the writings of St. Clement. Like Rousseau many centuries later, the world of material things, seen rationally, contains those things which are necessary and those things that are not in both a logical and a social sense. Societies become degenerate (literally, decadent) when those things seen as “unnecessary” and regulated by the private sector, are confused with necessary items. This is the perversion of economic science.

Summarizing Clement is fairly easy, since his approach to philosophy is coherent and straightforward. In Book II of the *Stromata* he writes:

And not only the Platonists, but the Stoics, say that assent is in our own power. All opinion then, and judgment, and supposition, and knowledge, by which we live and have perpetual intercourse with the human race, is an assent; which is nothing else than faith. And unbelief being defection from faith, shows both assent and faith to be possessed of power; for non-existence cannot be called privation. And if you consider the truth, you will find man naturally misled so as to give assent to what is false, though possessing the resources necessary for belief in the truth. “The virtue, then, that encloses the Church in its grasp,” as the Shepherd says, “is Faith, by which the elect of God are saved; and that which acts the man is self-restraint. And these are followed by Simplicity, Knowledge, Innocence, Decorum, Love,” and all these are the daughters of Faith. And again, “Faith leads the way, fear upbuilds, and love perfects.”

It is very common to hear the term “faith” defined as something other than knowledge. One has faith in another because they are sure, but not certain, they will act in the right way. Here, faith is defined as assent to the truth. We know the truth, we only believe in it because we want to. There are many reasons to reject it if one's lifestyle will be radically altered by it. Montanism is a devotion to a person. The truth of the utterance is based solely on that.

Faith is defined by the fathers as the proper use of the free will. We do not have to accept the truth of the church, or of anyone, for that matter. Normally, those rejecting the faith either a) do not understand it, or b) have a non-intellectual reason for rejecting it.

The subjectivism of the Montanist school was very far from this. The ecstatic prophesy was the gauge of reality, not reason, thought or even doctrine. The church has reached its maturity, according to the heretics, only with the advent of Montanus. It took subjectivity as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and hence rejected reality as such. Inspiration was more important than the senses or thought.

### **St. Augustine and Montanism in His *Confessions***

St. Augustine's opposition to this movement requires background information into his intellectual development. His move to Carthage is central because his career as a scholar and

rhetor really began there. In Carthage Augustine learned the doctrines of the pagan Manicheans, doctrines that took quite a while to abandon. Nearly a decade did Augustine hold, more or less, the radical materialism and dualism of this Persian sect so popular in north Africa.

Several things occurred during his time in this major African city that are worthy of note (Book III). First of all, he began to form a doctrine concerning the nature of reality. Augustine faults the intellectual life in this coastal city in that it can never really get beyond creation and never to its origin. They are stuck in the mire of the material world, and in a way, it becomes the god of this sect and the basic intellectual biases of the elite at the time. This exposure to intellectual pagan doctrines—that is, an intellectual paganism rather than a folk paganism—began his journey. What began to slowly take root is a desire not for matter, but for the Forms of Plato, or, to put it differently, the immaterial source(s) of all things. There was something inherently dissatisfying about the materialism of the pagan schools in the city, synthesized by the Persian doctrines (Book III, c IV, 8).

Secondly, Augustine, frustrated with the doctrinaire materialism of the schools in Carthage, began to see creation, that is, material things, as illusion. Hence, the thought of those things that come to be and pass away were not really worth discussing unless they manifested a wisdom that was higher than matter (III, c VI, 10). While Augustine did not know this truth at the time, it was this exposure that changed him and began his journey from materialism to Platonism, and from Platonism to Christianity.

The intellectual foundations of materialism were laid at his time in Carthage. While there, he made friends, and these friends were centered around intellectual and metaphysical questions. His best friend gets sick and dies. Death stares Augustine in the face, while the doctrines of the Manicheans served very little to explain this death, or the ultimate purpose of human life. Good and Evil in this system both had rights, and were both self-existent. Hence, all judgment had to be suspended on any serious moral question. But this faltered in the face of death, especially young death (IV, c VI, 11).

In Augustine's grief, he begins to quietly wonder about the nature of reality apart from the dualism of the Persians. Metaphysics is essential since the nature of the world and the human soul could provide Augustine with answers and perhaps solace in the face of the negation of all things in death. Death seems to be a negation of everything that secular science stands for: materialism, worldly life, worldly pleasures and power. None of these are anything other than distractions of they will soon (very soon) be swallowed up in the void.

What Augustine begins to see is that it is the inner man that needs attention. External reality is of great importance, but without inner peace, science is just playing with concepts (IV, c VII, 2). Created nature seems almost cursed, since it will soon pass away. The barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire and its possessions in Africa too, may have pushed Augustine into considering the ultimate end of all things. But this line of questioning will soon bring materialism to nothing, since it has no eternal value. In Chapter X of this book the first serious mention of material things “coming to be and passing away” becomes a torture to him. Death forces this line of questioning.

Ultimately, Augustine, in chapter XV of this book, begins to wonder if being (in the guise of beauty) exists on a hierarchy of values. If objects of a material nature will all disappear, does not this imply the existence of something that does not disappear? Clearly, material objects and causal chains did not cause themselves to exist (which involves a contradiction), therefore, the cause of their existence must lie outside them. It seems logical therefore, to posit that which does not pass away as a cause of all things, and the ultimate criterion for truth, beauty and being itself.

Rome served as a magnet for ambitious young men, and Augustine was certainly that at the time. It was also the western center of the church. But what happens early on is a more tolerable replay of his African life – Augustine gets deathly ill. In Book V, it is clear that Augustine holds that illness in general is derivative of sin. The moral problems of life are not isolated in intellectual truth, but have a physiological affect (V, c IX, 16). It is the disposition of the will that matters. Truth can only be seen by those who are not sick, but well in every respect, since only a pure will can see and understand the immaterial nature of God and the forms. In this respect does he agree with the Montanists.

Augustine further questions the doctrines of the Manicheans in that they hold that sin is not the fault of the person, the fault does not lie in the will, but from the “dark side” of reality, the ever existent negative force in the universe. But Augustine knows that he did sin (many times) and to attribute this to dark forces is rejecting responsibility. Augustine sees his illness in Rome as a central milestone. For Montanism, the sinfulness of man makes conceptual analysis suspect. Thus, only the intensely immediate infusion of grace can be understood as real. It is real precisely in that it is not human.

Finally, in Book VII, Augustine deals with the doctrine of the Neoplatonic school as preparatory for his conversion. The doctrines of Neoplatonism seem to strongly resemble Christian metaphysics without the personalization of God or spirits. Augustine later saw this as a flaw in this system, but as it stood, it served as an “Old Testament” to Augustine's “New” conversion. The doctrines of the Platonists explained in detail the world of spirits and the doctrine of the One God. Even more powerful was the idea that an impure and carnal soul will keep the mind from recognizing the spiritual nature of Reality (VII, c XX, 24-25). Ultimately, the doctrine of Platonic Forms can lead one to the doctrine of Christ. Augustine holds that while brilliant, the Platonic idea lacks forgiveness, salvation, sacrifice or even care for anything outside oneself. Hence, when converted to Platonism, the vision of Christ serves to provide these missing pieces. Plato and the Neoplatonic idea become the last gateway for Augustine to come to Christ. This becomes the essential intellectual framework of the Orthodox and Catholic church and the Montanist school, among others, declared war on it.

Montanism ultimately had no place in western thought, and, partly due to the immense influence of the African Doctor, the intellect, limited though it always is, maintained its powerful position. Montanism can be seen as an anti-intellectual movement as well as an anti-clerical one. It rejected the intellect altogether and, due to the immediacy of revelation, did not require a hierarchy. There was also the drawback of having no external benchmark of truth. The intellect, therefore, is the guarantor of order in that it is the reflection of logos in creation.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has argued two different but parallel theses; first, that the martyrdom of Perpetua contains visions that, while ecstatic in the Montanist sense, are fully orthodox in doctrine. Second, that the Montanists, regardless of their rigor, were too damaging to the order of the church to be tolerated. The entire concept of visions and these sort of “experiences” are rejected as a matter of course by the very structure of the human person. The church fathers could not be more explicit about the order of logos in the human person that both reflects the natural order and is meant to be an important aspect of it. In this lies its heretical and dangerous element.

The vision of Perpetua outlined above is not the sort of “harmful” revelation that the Montanists were often accused of. It was a part of her ecstatic state at the time of her murder. It is

a biblical vision very similar to Jacob's ladder, later to be taken by the monastic movement and made an important metaphorical icon. Therefore, it is reasonable to hold that the martyrdom of Perpetua is fully Orthodox, regardless of her vision. The Montanist concept most often revolved around the imminent descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem and hence, the direct rule of Christ. The fact that Tertullian wrote and promoted the cult of Perpetua does not, in itself, argue that this account is Montanist. It may well be that, given the nature of the vision here, it may well fit into the Montanist idea, but without making it, ipso facto, heretical.

On the other hand, the patristic anthropology and doctrine of logos made this approach to truth possible only in severe circumstances. While it is not entirely irrelevant, it is certainly not the foundation for Christian epistemology. It can be the foundation of no epistemology. Reason is a part of the natural order and is intrinsic to creation itself.

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