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The Early John Calvin and Augustine: Some Reconsiderations

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ABSTRACT

In recent research it has been argued that in his early career John Calvin developed an autonomous and independent Augustinianism, by means of direct readings, that was detached from any medieval background. Yet, this is problematic since a critical evaluation of Calvin's first uses of Augustine reveals that he already cherished the African Father long before having read any of his works, while, in his very first writings, he appears to have been familiar with medieval Augustinian compilations. Reconsidering, therefore, the early Calvin's relation to Augustine, the article argues that Calvin was an Augustinian long before engaging with Augustine, and that Late Medieval Augustinianism is all but an unlikely background for his first predilection of the African Father.

It is well known that Augustine played an eminent role in the work and thought of John Calvin. Augustine is by far the most extensively cited Church Father in Calvin's writings, and Calvin's and Augustine's understanding of Christian doctrine are in agreement to such a degree that Calvin, with some justification, famously claimed Augustine to be *totus noster*.¹ Accordingly, based on two groundbreaking collections of Augustinian citations and allusions from all of the Reformer's works, compiled in the middle of the last century,² Calvin's relation to and use of Augustine have become a common and well-explored topic in modern research that underscores, in general, Calvin's predilection for the African Father.³ This appears to be true even in Calvin's earliest

¹ John Calvin, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia* 3.1 (Geneva, 1998), 30; see J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinus totus noster: das Augustinverständnis bei Johannes Calvin*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 45 (Göttingen, 1990).

² Luchsius Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'œuvre de Jean Calvin*, 2 vols. (Assen, 1956-8), and Remko J. Mooi, *Het Kerk- en Dogmenhistorisch Element in de Werken van Johannes Calvijn* (Wageningen, 1965).

³ For a brief overview on the literature until 1997, see Johannes van Oort, 'John Calvin and the Church Fathers', in Irena Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (Leiden, 1997), 661-700, 661-2. The most recent summary is Anthony N.S. Lane, 'John Calvin', in Karla Pollmann (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford, 2013), II 739-43. See also Larissa Seelbach, 'Augustin und

writings that all rely on Augustine as their most important Patristic resource. Yet, a crucial problem remains. For, in contrast with Luther and Zwingli, who already read Augustine in their youth as part of their educational programs,⁴ it is unclear, with Calvin, at what point in his career he began to really absorb Augustinian theology and to study the Church Father's writings.

There are two trends in modern research regarding this question. After a series of studies that all too eagerly claimed the importance of Late Medieval Augustinianism Calvin would have imbibed while studying at Montaigu, under the influence of John Mair in particular, or during his law studies at Bourges and Orléans,⁵ a first modern trend is to completely deny any such influence. Since distinct Augustinian motifs are not clearly present in Calvin's earliest works, since he and John Mair may never have met at Montaigu, and since Calvin most probably studied civil law alone, and not canon law (where Augustine would have been prominent),⁶ Calvin is said to have developed, only after the time of his formal studies, his own Augustinianism, independent of medieval influences.⁷ Second, given the methodological difficulties in the detection of implicit intellectual dependencies, recent research has focused – as with the study of the reception of Augustine in general – on Calvin's explicit citations of the Church Father.⁸ For, while it is possible that unspecified doctrinal similarities between two positions are purely coincidental, explicit references imply

Calvin', in Michael Basse (ed.), *Calvin und seine Wirkungsgeschichte* (Berlin, 2011), 75-98, and S.J. Han, 'An Investigation into Calvin's Use of Augustine', in R.M. Britz and Victor E. d'Assonville (ed.), *Prompte et sincere: John Calvin and the Exposition of the Word of God*, Acta theologica Supplementum 10 (Bloemfontein, 2008), 70-83.

⁴ This is obvious for the Augustinian monk Luther; for Zwingli see, among other writings, his annotations to Francis of Mayronis' commentary on *De civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate*. On this see Daniel Bolliger, *Infiniti Contemplatio. Grundzüge der Scotus- und Scotismuszereption im Werk Huldrych Zwinglis* (Leiden, 2003), 386-7.

⁵ As prominently proposed by François Wendel, *Calvin. Sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse*, Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses 41 (Paris, 1950), 16, repeated by L. Smits, *Saint Augustin* (1956), I 14-5, and then elaborated by Karl Reuter, *Das Grundverständnis der Theologie Calvins*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche 15 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1963), and *id.*, *Vom Scholaren bis zum jungen Reformator: Studien zum Werdegang Johannes Calvins* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981), as well as Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987), 99-105.

⁶ The first to have brought forward these arguments was Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le jeune Calvin. Genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte 40 (Wiesbaden, 1966), 191-2; for a more recent account see Ueli Zahnd, *Calvin, l'âme humaine, et la philosophie classique. Influences philosophiques sur la Psychopannychia, premier écrit théologique de Calvin*, Cahiers de la Revue de théologie et de philosophie 23 (Geneva, 2009), 73-5.

⁷ Most prominently Heiko A. Oberman, 'Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation', in Wilhelm H. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor* (Grand Rapids, 1994), 122; but see J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 167 and 179-80, and S.J. Han, 'Calvin's Use' (2008), 80-1.

⁸ See, in particular, A.N.S. Lane, 'John Calvin' (2013).

a certain intentionality, and hence appear more significant for arguments concerning intellectual relationships. By means of studies of his explicit citations, modern research has placed the beginning of Calvin's independent engagement with Augustine, at the latest, to the first edition of the *Institutes* printed in 1536.⁹

Yet, things are not as clear as they might seem, and for three reasons in particular. First, the question of a possible influence of late medieval Augustinianism on Calvin cannot be reduced to the biographical problems of his relation to John Mair and of his possible studies of canon law. Even when assuming that Calvin never studied under John Mair, this does not relieve him from medieval influences during his stay at Montaigu.¹⁰ For, in that case, he must have studied with other scholastic teachers, and there is no reason to assume that they were less 'medieval' than Mair.¹¹ Concerning his studies at Orleans and Bourges, it is true that there is no hard evidence that Calvin studied both civil and canon law – undeniably, however, he appears to have been familiar, since his earliest writings, with one of the base texts of medieval canon law, namely the *Decretum Gratiani*.¹² Hence, whatever one considers as Calvin's true biography, given his education at Montaigu and his familiarity with medieval source texts, he cannot be detached from the late medieval background in which he grew up – but in this background, Augustine played an eminent role both in theology and philosophy.

Second, while the greater significance of explicit citations is undeniable, the problem remains that, taken on their own, these citations do not prove anything either. Just as with doctrinal similarities that do not demonstrate that one author has read the other,¹³ an explicit citation does not provide evidence of a direct reading, since it might stem either from hearsay or any kind of intermediary sources, be it anthologies or casual citations in other works at hand. Particular caution is advised in cases where a work is only mentioned once or twice or where a reference appears within a bulk of other citations.¹⁴ Yet, in

⁹ J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 66; J. van Oort, 'John Calvin' (1997), 666-7; L. Seelbach, 'Augustin und Calvin' (2011), 87. Others were more enthusiastic even for Calvin's earlier writings, see H.A. Oberman, 'Initia' (1994), 122.

¹⁰ See Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Johann Calvin: Leben und Werk in seiner Frühzeit 1509-1541*, Reformed Historical Theology 6 (Göttingen, 2009), 37-8.

¹¹ On the contrary, John Mair was rather open-minded regarding the new intellectual traditions, see the contributions in John T. Slotemaker and Jeffrey C. Witt (eds), *A Companion to the Theology of John Mair*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 60 (Leiden, 2015).

¹² Ford L. Battles, 'The Sources of Calvin's Seneca Commentary', in Gervase Duffield (ed.), *Studies in John Calvin* (Appleford, 1966), 38-66, 56; see J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 165.

¹³ Regarding Calvin, this was already argued by F. Wendel, *Sources et évolution* (1950), 100-1; see also U. Zahnd, *Psychopannychia* (2009), 18-9.

¹⁴ If someone really had studied an entire work, he probably would cite it more than once, and simply concatenated citations remind one of florilegia, see below, fn. 51. For medieval

such mediated references to a source the supposed intentionality is even more significant, since it helps to identify the prejudices someone had about a source and its author not known from direct readings.¹⁵ Now, Calvin is known, in his early writings in particular, to have used intermediary sources such as the *Decretum Gratiani*,¹⁶ but in modern research only the need for a qualified evaluation of his unmediated citations has been recognized, based on which the beginning of his own Augustinianism was dated to the 1536 *Institutes*.¹⁷ This provokes all the more, however, the question of knowing how to classify the prominent, but mediated citations of Augustine in Calvin's pre-1536 writings.

This leads to a third point that has to be taken into account. Given that, since his earliest writings, Calvin particularly respected and preferred Augustine, he seems to have been – at least in a broad sense – an Augustinian from the very beginning of his literary career. This is all the more true since, in this early period, he more than once imitated Augustine, or, at least, legitimized his behavior with the example of Augustine.¹⁸ Hence, there seem to remain only two alternatives: either to maintain that Calvin developed his own and independent Augustinianism, and, as a consequence, to antedate this development to Calvin's earliest writings where his predilection first appears; or to consider the qualified status of his earliest citations and to admit that Calvin was an Augustinian before engaging with Augustine.

In what follows, this second alternative is defended. In the limits of this short account, the main focus lies on a reevaluation of some of Calvin's allusions to, and citations of, Augustine in his earliest writings, in order to confirm and even to elaborate on the qualified status of these references with regards to Calvin's actual reading of Augustine – as a matter of fact, there will be reasons to extend this qualification even to the 1536 *Institutes*. A few concluding remarks might adumbrate, then, how to re-open the debate for the adjacent question of knowing where else Calvin's Augustinianism was rooted if not in his own and independent readings.

Augustinian florilegia see the next note, for early modern see Arnoud S.Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation. The Flexibility of Intellectual Authorities in Europe, 1500-1620* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁵ Regarding Augustine, see Erik L. Saak, 'The Augustinian Renaissance. Textual Scholarship and Religious Identity in the Later Middle Ages', in *The Historical Reception of Augustine* (2013), I 66: 'Understandings of Augustine's authority, various affinities with Augustine, interpretations of the authentic Augustine and his works, and created images of Augustine were not above and beyond, but preconditions for, how Augustine was cited'.

¹⁶ See F.L. Battles, 'The Sources' (1966), 56, and the respective paragraphs in F.L. Battles and André M. Hugo, 'Introduction', in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De clementia* (Leiden, 1969), 1*-140*.

¹⁷ See above, fn. 9.

¹⁸ See below, p. 191, fn. 69.

1. Calvin's commentary on Seneca's *De clementia*

Calvin launched his literary career as a humanist in 1532 when he published a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia*. Undoubtedly, he wrote this commentary in response to a challenge posed by Erasmus and his (uncommented) edition of Seneca's works, since Erasmus had excused the lack of accompanying comments with the demand that someone *doctior, felicior, & ociosior* may fulfill this task.¹⁹ Flaunting himself as a second Erasmus, Calvin wrote a commentary that abounded with classical allusions and citations, but it has become apparent that most of these references stem from intermediary sources such as Erasmus' *Adagia*, Budé's *De asse et partibus eius*, or Philippe Beroalde's commentary on Cicero's *Tusculan disputations*.²⁰ Besides the overwhelming majority of references to classical authors, there are several that also refer to Patristic sources and, most prominently, to Augustine. In modern research, 18 allusions to the African Father have been identified,²¹ but only 14 of them explicitly name Augustine or one of his works, and only six provide a citation.²²

Most of these explicit references (three of those with citation, and all those without) allude to *De civitate Dei*. While this could indicate that Calvin actually had read the work, the modern editors of Calvin's commentary have shown that the passages referred to are so generally known and cited in Calvin's time that they do not demonstrate a personal reading.²³ With regards to one of the explicit citations, it even has been suggested that Calvin took it from the *Decretum Gratiani*, since Calvin alludes to it by means of the very title it was cited under in this medieval text of canon law.²⁴ This suggestion can be supported by a closer look at two other references. In the first reference, discussing the right

¹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, 'Epistola nuncupatoria', in *Lucii Annei Senecae Opera* (Basel, 1529), fol. a3^v; see F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, 'Introduction' (1969), 34*-5*.

²⁰ See F.L. Battles, 'The Sources' (1966), 40-7, and F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, 'Introduction' (1969), 103*-4*.

²¹ L. Smits, *Saint Augustin* (1958), II 61; and the two complements in F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, 'Introduction' (1969), 132* n. 5.

²² I.e., John Calvin, *On Seneca's De clementia*, ed. F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo (Leiden, 1969), 11, l.19; 33, ll. 35-6; 93, ll. 23-4; 103, ll. 40-1; 129, ll. 11-2; and 135, ll. 36-7.

²³ F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, 'Introduction' (1969), 132* n. 5. J. van Oort, 'John Calvin' (1997), 663, suggests 'that Calvin consulted the 1522 edition of *De civitate Dei* by J.L. Vives together with the famous humanist's influential commentary', but he does not provide any proof for this.

²⁴ J. Calvin, *On Seneca's De clementia*, 103, ll. 40-104, l. 3: *Nam, ut ait Augustinus de communi vita clericorum, 'duae res sunt conscientia et fama. Conscientia necessaria est tibi, fama proximo tuo...'* This text appears in almost the same wording under the title of *De communi vita clericorum* in *Decretum Gratiani*, ed. Aemilius Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici* 1 (Leipzig, 1879), II, C.12, q.1, c.10 (680); while the Augustinian sermon it originally stems from (*Sermo* 355.1) is entitled *De moribus clericorum* and only has *conscientia tibi, fama proximo tuo* in the second sentence.

of asylum and alluding without citation to *De civitate Dei* 1,²⁵ Calvin describes the transfer of this right to Christian churches *ut legitur in multis iuris locis, vide Augustinum*.²⁶ Bringing together legal sources and Augustine, this reference is significant since in the occasional passages of civil law dealing with asylum, Augustine is completely absent,²⁷ while he is commonly used in those of canon law that are much more concerned with the topic – even if they usually do not refer to *De civitate Dei* 1.²⁸ Although this is no proof that Calvin relies here on canon law, he undeniably parallels the canonists' use of Augustine when dealing with asylum.

Much more telling is the second reference. It concerns the only explicit Augustine citation of his commentary that has not been identified so far, even if, in modern research, a few parallels in sense have been suggested from Augustine's oeuvre.²⁹ Discussing on what grounds one could have pity even with sinners, Calvin switches in *De clementia* 11.13–21 into the first person in order to present his own opinion:³⁰ reminding the reader of a shared and common human nature, he adds: *quemadmodum ait Augustinus 'persequamur in eis propriam iniquitatem, misereamur communem naturam'*.³¹ The modern editors of Calvin's commentary admitted that he might have drawn this citation 'from some intermediary source, but not from Gratian'³² – most probably since none of the so far suggested Augustinian parallels appears in the *Decretum*. The citation as provided by Calvin, however, was well known in the late Middle Ages from at least three different sources: first from the common glosses to *Galatians* 6:10 where, in a slightly different wording, it was explicitly attributed to Augustine;³³ second from a sermon *De generalitate eleemosynarum* that was sometimes ascribed to Augustine and almost conforms with Calvin's

²⁵ Besides *De civitate Dei* I 4 suggested by the editors, a possible reference is also *De civitate Dei* I 34.

²⁶ J. Calvin, *On Seneca's De clementia*, 111, l. 40–112, l. 1.

²⁷ E.g., the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, 5th ed., ed. Paul Krueger, Theodor Mommsen, Rudolf Schoell and Wilhelm Kroll, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1889), 1.12 (13) and 21.1.17 (211–2); see, in general, Harald Seims, 'Asyl in der Kirche? Wechsellagen des Kirchenasyls im Mittelalter', in Martin Dreher (ed.), *Das antike Asyl: Kultische Grundlagen, rechtliche Ausgestaltung und politische Funktion* (Cologne, 2003), 263–99.

²⁸ See the *Decretum Gratiani* II, C.17, q.4 (815–28); or Henry of Segusio, *Summa super titulis Decretalium* (Strasbourg, 1478), III 49 (357^v–62^r).

²⁹ L. Smits, *Saint Augustin* (1958), II 61; repeated by F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary* (1969), 43, note to line 19.

³⁰ J. Calvin, *On Seneca's De clementia*, 11, ll. 13–4: *Ego vero causas mihi sum commentus quibus possem omnibus succurrere*. There are only seven other places in the commentary where Calvin intervenes with *ego* (*ibid.* 35.23, 43.2, 47.32, 72.19, 104.16 and 35, and 145.3).

³¹ *Ibid.* 11.19.

³² F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary* (1969), 43, note to line 19.

³³ See both the *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. IV (Strasbourg, 1486), fol. 185^{rb-va} and Peter Lombard, *Collectanea in epistolas Pauli*, PL 191, 166C: *Persequamur ergo in malis propriam iniquitatem, misereamur in eisdem communem conditionem*.

formulation;³⁴ and third – and in Calvin’s exact wording – from the *Decretum Gratiani* in a canon that dealt with the precise question Calvin was considering and attributed the citation to Augustine.³⁵ Among these three, the most probable source for Calvin is thus Gratian, whence a third, namely two of the six verbatim citations explicitly attributed to Augustine in Calvin’s commentary, stem from the *Decretum* – which was also the source for at least three other Patristic references of Calvin’s commentary.³⁶

It appears, therefore, that in this first work of Calvin, the medieval use of Augustine was more important than has been admitted so far. It is true that, beside the much greater amount of classical citations, these few Patristic allusions seem to loose importance regardless of where they stem from. But when considering not only how often and from what sources, but also where and how these references were adopted, it becomes clear that they are used at pivotal points in the commentary. Even if Calvin tries to show off as an expert of classical thought and philosophy, he sometimes feels the need to qualify classical accounts with regards to ‘our religion’, and this is where Augustine appears.³⁷ This is most prominently the case in one of the places where Calvin cites Augustine according to the *Decretum*: after presenting the philosophers understanding of conscience, Calvin adds: *haec apud philosophos valeant, nobis vero longe aliud praescribit nostra religio*, and he goes on and cites Gratian-Augustine in order to tell what exactly our religion prescribes.³⁸ Augustine, as mediated by the *Decretum*, is thus representative of *nostra religio*, what has been considered enough to put Calvin ‘in the best Augustinian tradition’.³⁹

Yet, this is a role the Church Father plays in other passages as well. While it is true that Augustine is also used as a ‘neutral’ witness for historical episodes and for confirming the usage of a certain vocabulary,⁴⁰ when it comes to religious terms, he is the one to provide the true meaning of a concept against philosophers.⁴¹ Taken together with the other citation from the *Decretum* (or from

³⁴ This sermon can be found in PL 40, 1230; the last word is *conditionem* instead of *naturam*.

³⁵ *Decretum Gratiani* II, C.23, q.4, c.35 (916).

³⁶ Besides those detected by F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo – *Calvin’s Commentary* (1969), 25.4-9 (*Decretum Gratiani* I, d.45, c.10 [164-5], citing Gregory the Great); and *Calvin’s Commentary* (1969), 116.1-2; *Decretum Gratiani* II, C.7, q.1, c.41 (582) citing Jerome – see the reference to Gregory the Great in 27.9-11 and *Decretum Gratiani* I, d.41, c.6 (150).

³⁷ For an unpolemical reference to *nostra religio* see J. Calvin, *On Seneca’s De clementia*, 6, l. 34.

³⁸ J. Calvin, *On Seneca’s De clementia*, 103, l. 39-104, l. 3.

³⁹ F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, ‘Introduction’ (1969), 61*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 96*-9* and 122*.

⁴¹ This is the case to a lesser extent in *On Seneca’s De clementia*, 93, ll. 17-25, where Calvin *ut tamen intelligant lectores quid vere sit pietas* first cites Cicero, and only then Augustine; but it is obvious in 149, ll. 11-2 on pity, where Calvin alludes to Augustine *contra Stoicos*; on this last passage, see F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, ‘Introduction’ (1969), 61*. An exception is the term *religio* itself in 150, l. 21-151, l. 5.

another medieval source) where Calvin alludes to Augustine in order to present his own understanding of every human being worthy of pity, it becomes apparent that Augustine, as mediated by medieval sources, already played a prominent role in the formation of Calvin's earliest religious convictions, and was for him the main representative of *nostra religio*.⁴²

2. The *Psychopannychia*

The second work Calvin composed in his early career is the *Psychopannychia*, written and revised between 1534 and 1536.⁴³ This short treatise on the soul's immortality and its conscious survival after death marks the transition of the humanist Calvin to Calvin the theologian. His humanist enthusiasm is still evident, for, having challenged Erasmus in his first writing, Calvin now rivaled Cicero who, in face of the many dissenting opinions of philosophers about the soul's state after death had exclaimed: *quae vera sit, deus aliquis viderit*.⁴⁴ Calvin, in his *Psychopannychia*, proposed to look for precisely this true opinion and stated *id vero quam verum sit, nunc doceamus*.⁴⁵ He found it, however, in a new domain, since, given the philosopher's failure, Calvin proposed to argue on a purely biblical basis, saying farewell to human reasoning and philosophical accounts.⁴⁶ Besides innumerable biblical citations, the treatise has only five explicit references to classical authors, but bears more than forty allusions to Church Fathers in order to substantiate his interpretation of certain biblical passages.⁴⁷

It is important to note that this Patristic support was not used against doctrines put forward in medieval theology, but against what Calvin thought to have arisen *ex Anabaptistarum faece*.⁴⁸ Hence, while even some early Lutherans promoted the concept of soul sleep as a welcome response to the doctrine

⁴² For the meaning of *nostra religio* in late Medieval Augustinianism, see E.L. Saak, 'The Augustinian Renaissance' (2013), 66-7.

⁴³ Even if it was only published in 1542, there is no reason to assume that Calvin ever fundamentally revised his first version from 1534, see U. Zahnd, *Psychopannychia* (2009), 25-7.

⁴⁴ Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, ed. Max Pohlenz (Leipzig, 1918), I 11.23 (229).

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* 5, Corpus Reformatorum 33 (Braunschweig, 1866), 180. For these Ciceronian parallels in Calvin's *Psychopannychia* see Ueli Zahnd, 'Vom *philosophiae Romanae column* zum *ethnicus ille*. Die Cicero-Rezeption beim jungen Calvin', forthcoming in Günther Frank and Anne Eusterschulte (eds), *Cicero in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Melancthon-Schriften der Stadt Bretten 13 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt).

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 178.

⁴⁷ See R.J. Mooi, *Dogmenhistorisch Element* (1965), 365, and Jung-Uck Hwang, *Der junge Calvin und seine Psychopannychia* (Frankfurt, 1991), 297-311.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 171-2.

of the purgatory,⁴⁹ Calvin's rebuttal of the concept was in line with the common medieval understanding of the immortal soul, its conscious state after corporeal death, and its progressive rapprochement with God – an understanding that, in Latin Christendom, was rooted, not least, in the thought of Augustine. Unsurprisingly, with sixteen references, Augustine is the most important Patristic resource in Calvin's treatise,⁵⁰ but once more this should not be overestimated. The references stem from eleven different works, some of which Calvin would never allude to again, and most of the references appear together with other Patristic allusions in concatenations of at least three citations.⁵¹ This very use of somewhat randomly concatenated and uncontextualized Patristic references, of course, was typical for the medieval *catena* approach to Scripture – and as a matter of fact, more than once Calvin used a reference to Augustine against Augustine's original intention, a fact Calvin would have known if he had read the passage in context.⁵² What is more, three of his 'Augustinian' references are to works that only the medievals thought to originate from Augustine, while, in humanist and reformed circles of Calvin's time, their inauthenticity was already known.⁵³

Calvin appears, therefore, to have been in line with the approach of standard medieval sourcebooks of biblical interpretation such as the *Glossa ordinaria*⁵⁴ or Peter Lombard's *Glosa magna in Psalterium et epistolas Pauli*.⁵⁵ A particularly interesting case is Calvin's exposition of *Luke* 16:19-31 with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. With the help of eight Patristic references, but none from Augustine, Calvin underscores that this passage should not be understood as a parable, but as a report,⁵⁶ an understanding which – with at least some of

⁴⁹ See U. Zahnd, *Psychopannychia* (2009), 34.

⁵⁰ See L. Smits, *Saint Augustin* (1956), II, 61.

⁵¹ Hence, more than 80% of the Patristic references are concentrated in only five passages, see U. Zahnd, *Psychopannychia* (2009), 72.

⁵² See J.-U. Hwang, *Der junge Calvin* (1991), 300-1; the same is true for most of Calvin's other Patristic references.

⁵³ I.e., the *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus* which is actually by Gennadius of Marseille, in Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 215, and the anonymous *De spiritu et anima* (*ibid.* 181 and 206-7). The reference to the former was exchanged, in the second edition of the *Psychopannychia* from 1545, with a reference to Bernard of Clairvaux; for the latter see also A.N.S. Lane, 'John Calvin' (2013), 742.

⁵⁴ Compare, e.g., Calvin's exposition of *Gen.* 1:26 (Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 180) with *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 1 (1480), fol. a8^{ra}; or his understanding of the *sinus Abrahæ* (Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 188-9) with *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4 (1481), fol. f4^{ra}.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., the typical gloss that *fieri* in *1Cor.* 15:54 means *impleri* (Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 206) and Peter Lombard, *Glosa magna*, PL 191, 1691 – the later Calvin would not bother to explain this anymore, see his *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Corinthos I*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* 49, Corpus Reformationum 77 (Braunschweig, 1892), 563. The Augustinian citation in *Psychopannychia*, 202-3, explaining *1Cor.* 15:42, is already in Lombard's *Glosa magna*, 1688 on the same verse.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 187.

the Patristic references provided by Calvin – was always underscored in medieval glosses, too, and in the *Catena aurea* of Thomas Aquinas in particular.⁵⁷ Now, Calvin continued by arguing that his opponents nevertheless could not claim Augustine's support, even if, at one point in *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine understood Lazarus as Christ and the rich man as the Pharisees, for, in introducing an analogical reading, Augustine rather confirmed the factual character of the passage.⁵⁸ The problem is that neither in *De Genesi ad litteram* nor elsewhere did Augustine introduce the analogy to which Calvin referred. It can be found, however, in Theophylactus' *Ennaratio in Evangelium Lucae*, and this is a passage that was also present in Thomas Aquinas' *Catena aurea* on *Luke* 16.⁵⁹ Whatever Calvin's direct source may have been, it is thus apparent that he relied not on personal reading, but profited from compilations that stood in the medieval tradition.

Once more, Calvin's use of these medieval Augustinian slivers is telling. It is true that at two places he slightly disagrees with what he thinks to be Augustine's opinion, but he does so in a very hesitant and respectful way, while he has no problem stating that Chrysostom simply erred.⁶⁰ At another place, where his opponents might have relied on Augustine, Calvin is concerned to show that the Church Father is on his side,⁶¹ and in a third passage, he recognizes that Augustine had once held the position of his opponents, but that he later corrected himself in his *Retractationes*.⁶² In a similar sense, he presents in yet another passage Augustine as *sui ipsius interpret*.⁶³ While the former allusions underscore in general his particular respect for Augustine,⁶⁴ the latter shows that Calvin – prior, it seems, to having read any of Augustine's works – already knew how to argue with Augustine and the specificities of his oeuvre on quite a sophisticated level. This is all the more significant since the use of the *Retractationes* and the principle of self-interpretation were prominent means by which the late medieval revival of Augustinianism could derive Augustine's true

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, ed. Angelico Guarienti (Torino, 1953), II 227; see also *Glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4 (1481), fol. f3^{vb}.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 187: *Hoc magis ridiculum, quod errori suo praetendunt Augustini nomen, quem cavillantur in hanc opinionem consensisse: opinor, quia quodam loco dixerit: in parabola per Lazarum Christum intelligendum: per divitem Phariseos: quum nihil aliud significet quam narrationem transferri ad parabolam.*

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea*, II 234.

⁶⁰ For Chrysostom, see Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 180–1; for Augustine, *ibid.* 181: *id cum multis, nec fortasse improbe, dicere poteram; and 191: Augustinus sic accipit, sed nimis dure.*

⁶¹ See above, fn. 58.

⁶² Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 202, see also above, fn. 55.

⁶³ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 216; for Calvin's later adoption of this principle of self-interpretation for Augustine see J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 89 and 103.

⁶⁴ See also Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 216: *Neque displicet, quod alicubi docendi causa traditum est ab eodem, si tamen sanum et modestum interpretem habeat.*

meaning.⁶⁵ Regarding the principle of self-interpretation that originally stemmed from the Homeric exegetical tradition, it is true that it was also used in the late medieval discussions about the right understanding of Thomas Aquinas,⁶⁶ and, of course, it would become an important tool of humanist philology and reformed biblical exegesis. Yet, taken together with the late medieval proximities of Calvin's approach to Scripture, and given the fact that he adopted the principle and applied it to Augustine (not the Bible) together with arguments based on the *Retractationes*, late medieval Augustinianism is, at least, not an unlikely background from which he might have been inspired in his *Psychopannychia*.⁶⁷

3. Two prefatory letters from 1535 and the first *Institutes*

The *Psychopannychia* was only the starting point of Calvin's privileged theological use of Augustine. In 1535, Calvin had the honor of writing the prominent prefatory letter to Olivétan's French translation of the Bible, and in the same year he dedicated, in a long letter, the 1536 *Institutes* to King Francis I. In both letters, Calvin underscored the importance and prominence of Augustine for the study of Christian doctrine,⁶⁸ and in both texts he paralleled his own positions with those of the Church Father: in the *Praefatio* to Olivétan's Bible, Calvin includes an appeal to ordinary people to engage with Scripture and legitimized these readings by reminding the reader of Augustine (together with Chrysostom) and of their similar exhortations that everybody read the Bible;⁶⁹ and in his dedication to the King, Calvin paralleled *causam nostram* with the struggle of Augustine against the Donatists, making the Father's words his own: *idem ergo nunc nostris adversariis respondemus, quod tunc Donatistis Augustinus*.⁷⁰ It seems that, after imitating Erasmus and Cicero, Calvin tried now to establish himself as a new Church Father, and as a second Augustine in particular.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum Sententiarum*, vol. IV, ed. A. Damasus Trapp (Göttingen, 1978), II, dd.3-5, q.1, a.3 (382); and for the use of the *Retractationes*, see E.L. Saak, 'The Augustinian Renaissance' (2013), 61.

⁶⁶ Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen, 'Thomas von Aquin und der Dominikanerorden. Lehrtraditionen bei den Mendikanten des späten Mittelalters', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 57 (2010), 260-85, 272.

⁶⁷ In this respect, I reconsider what I concluded in my *Psychopannychia* (2009), 76.

⁶⁸ J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 57-61.

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Praefationes Bibliis*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* 9, Corpus Reformatorum 37 (Braunschweig, 1870), 788-9; see J. van Oort, 'John Calvin' (1997), 664.

⁷⁰ John Calvin, *Francisco Francorum Regi*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* 1, Corpus Reformatorum 29 (Braunschweig, 1863), 15-6. See also L. Seelbach, 'Augustin und Calvin' (2011), 86-7.

Unsurprisingly, in the 1536 *Institutes* Augustine remained the most important Patristic resource. Yet it needs to be noted that alongside the 27 detected allusions to Augustine's works – that outmatch by far any other Patristic author – are 25 references to the *Decretum Gratiani* and 16 references to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, where many of his Augustinian citations can already be found.⁷¹ This undeniable presence of medieval resources has long been noted, but after what has been argued above, it is no longer possible to consider them as Calvin's first and unprejudiced contact with medieval theology, but rather as the continuation of an approach that was already present in his earliest writings.

Nevertheless, Calvin's independence from medieval approaches has been argued, first, since Calvin openly contested Peter Lombard's uses of Augustine,⁷² and second, since in one passage at least it seems that Calvin read for himself the Augustine text he quoted.⁷³ Concerning the first point, however, Calvin only intensified in the *Institutes* what generations of medieval theologians – and those in an Augustinian tradition in particular – had done when commenting on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, i.e. reviewing Lombard's accounts and challenging them when Lombard seemed to have misunderstood an authority.⁷⁴ Even if he advanced it in a very harsh tone, Calvin's critical attitude is thus anything but evidence for an independent, 'unmedieval' approach. The second point has been put forward with regards to a passage dealing with our acceptance of God's mercy. As a confirmation of his accounts, Calvin adduces *ut ait Augustinus: nostra merita obliti, Christi dona amplectimur*.⁷⁵ While it is true that this citation cannot be found in the typical medieval textbooks, thus suggesting an independent reading, it has to be noted that it cannot be found in Augustine, either. Against his own account (and the one of recent Calvin research),⁷⁶ Calvin is simply not citing the Church Father here, but only alluding to a passage he says to be taken from '*De verbis Apostoli*, chapter 11'. In one of Augustine's sermons *De verbis Apostoli*, a parallel in sense can indeed be found, yet the sermon is not organized in chapters, and it is the eighth, not

⁷¹ R.J. Mooi, *Dogmenhistorisch Element* (1965), 366 (I have added the 3 citations of pseudo-Augustinian works to the 24 authentic works).

⁷² J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 62-3; building on the work of Lange van Ravenswaay, see: J. van Oort, 'John Calvin' (1997), 666-7; S.J. Han, 'Calvin's Use' (2008), 79; and L. Seelbach, 'Augustin und Calvin' (2011), 87.

⁷⁴ Concerning sacramental theology in general, see, e.g., the reevaluations of Lombard's Augustinian accounts in the early fourteenth century in Ueli Zahnd, *Wirksame Zeichen? Sakramentenlehre und Semiotik in der Scholastik des ausgehenden Mittelalters, Spätmittelalter – Humanismus – Reformation* 80 (Tübingen, 2014), 192-222.

⁷⁵ John Calvin, *Christianae Religionis Institutio [1536]*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* 1, Corpus Reformatorum 29 (Braunschweig, 1863), 48.

⁷⁶ See above, fn. 73.

the eleventh sermon from whose second paragraph the parallel stems.⁷⁷ Hence, when taking seriously Calvin's own indication – and he maintained it until the 1554 edition of the *Institutes*⁷⁸ – it seems that Calvin did not even know how the sermon of Augustine from which he 'cited' was organized. Be this as it may, the allusion is definitely not sufficient evidence for a personal reading of Augustine – rather it seems that, even for the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin had not yet read the Church Father.

4. Concluding remarks

In this short survey, two things have become apparent. The first is that Calvin cherished, defended, and imitated Augustine ever since he appeared as a writer, but long before he demonstrably had read any of Augustine's works. Therefore, whether or not he was already in line with truly Augustinian motifs, Calvin tried to be an Augustinian before engaging with Augustine. The second is that, already in his very first writings and long before reading Augustine himself, Calvin was familiar with medieval texts and medieval approaches that were at the core of the medieval reception of Augustine.⁷⁹ It seems thus all but likely that Calvin's own Augustinianism was rooted in the late medieval tradition. This is not to say that scholars such as Reuter or McGrath were simply right. Beyond dispute they went too far in detecting doctrinal parallels and in claiming intellectual dependencies; yet the fact that they overshot the mark does not mean that they were completely wrong: late medieval Augustinianism remains a serious background for the theological development of the early Calvin.

This leads back to the biographical question: where would Calvin have encountered this Augustinianism? An answer cannot be the task of the present survey, yet one point should be stressed. The prominence of the *Decretum Gratiani* in Calvin's earliest works is certainly a promising trace, but still more promising seems to be his philosophical education at Montaigu. For, while it is manifest that theological works such as John Mair's *Sentences* commentary are not the place to look for Augustinian motifs that might have impressed Calvin, the philosophy that was taught in Montaigu is an obvious context. Contrary to what has been argued,⁸⁰ in this philosophy, theological resources

⁷⁷ This is referred to as *Sermo* 174, PL 38, 941. The parallel reads: *Quaere dona mea, obliviscere merita tua; quia si ego quaererem merita tua, non venires ad dona mea.*

⁷⁸ The footnote in *Ioannis Calvini opera* 1, 751, is an emendation; see John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, X 23 (Geneva, 1554), 555.

⁷⁹ For the role of *Glosses*, the *Decretum Gratiani*, or Peter Lombard's *Sentences* in this reception see E.L. Saak, 'The Augustinian Renaissance' (2013), 59.

⁸⁰ J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinverständnis* (1990), 160.

and Augustine in particular were prominently present. Even if Calvin might never have studied under him, John Mair is representative for this philosophical context, and as a philosopher, Mair regularly relied on Augustine, be it in logic,⁸¹ ethics,⁸² or physics.⁸³ It is this philosophical reception of Augustine, therefore, that needs further evaluation in order to reassess the underestimated, but obvious medieval background of Calvin's reception of Augustine.

⁸¹ See, e.g., John Mair, *Libri quos in artibus in collegio Montis acuti Parisius regentando compilavit* (Lyon, 1508), fols. 4^{rb}, 10^{va}, 49^{va}, 157^{ra}; and the many references to Robert Holcot's *Sentences* commentary in the same work. For a more general example, see Alexander Broadie, *The Circle of John Mair. Logic and Logicians in Pre-Reformation Scotland* (Oxford, 1985), 36-7.

⁸² E.g. John Mair, *Ethica Aristotelis* (Paris, 1530), fols. 63^v, 93^v, 94^v, 118^r, 128^v, 160^v, 167^r; see also the reference to the *Decretum Gratiani* concerning the *error Pelagii* (fol. 118^r).

⁸³ E.g. John Mair, *Octo libri physicorum* (Paris, 1526), fols. a3^{va}, s2^{rb}, s3^{vb}; see also the reference to the *Decretum Gratiani* (fol. t3^{ra}).

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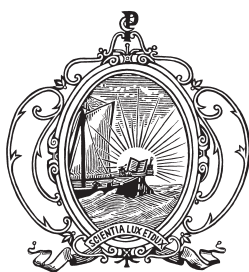
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