

AUGUSTINE AND EMERGENT EVOLUTION

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Jacob Klapwijk appeals to Augustine on two distinct issues which are closely linked. The first concerns the approach to which Klapwijk commits himself: faith seeking understanding. He calls it Augustinian. I show in this essay that there is a considerable gap between what Augustine means by it and what Klapwijk does with it. Augustine means that what I believe I must seek to understand. Klapwijk means that faith opens up the whole world of science and philosophy to the believer. The second issue is that Klapwijk finds in the Church Father a view of time which he wants to appropriate: God created out of nothing and thus time itself is also a creature which began with the creation. I show that his affirmation of this doctrine comes with a price. He cannot simply set aside what he calls Scholasticism. In the final paragraph I attempt to show that at a deeper level Klapwijk does indeed stand in the Augustinian tradition.

Jacob Klapwijk's *Purpose in the Living World?* (1980) is a philosophical book. The author attempts to relate the religious doctrine of creation to the scientific account of evolution. He is of the opinion that Herman Dooyeweerd, with whose philosophy he has a close affinity, unjustifiably rejected the possibility of evolution. It belongs to philosophy, however, to make such an attempt, not to any of the special sciences. Klapwijk distinguishes two levels of consciousness: a religious consciousness which gives rise to faith and an analytical consciousness which gives rise to science. Klapwijk then distinguishes between the special sciences and philosophy as a totality science. The latter "analyzes the mutual relations between the special sciences; it also analyzes the relationship between scientific theory and pre-scientific or practical life experience. Christian faith is part of the latter." (*Purpose* 199)<sup>1</sup> With regard to the scientific account of evolution Klapwijk defends the view of an emergent evolution; with regard to the hermeneutic horizon of faith he defends what he calls the Augustinian position. This position is contrasted with two others which Klapwijk rejects: the Scholastic position of nature and grace on the one hand and the naturalistic position on the other. What these positions are shall become clear in the course of my contribution.

The Church Father Augustine (354 – 430) receives, therefore, the role of star witness in the case for emergent evolution which Klapwijk wants to defend in this book. As a matter of fact, Klapwijk calls upon Augustine on two distinct but related issues for which he argues in his book. First of all, Klapwijk calls upon him to defend the general approach of how faith relates to philosophy and

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<sup>1</sup> On *Purpose* 200, Klapwijk presents his view schematically in three concentric circles, of which the religious is the outer circle, philosophy the medial and the special sciences form the inner circle.

science. Secondly, he appeals to the Church Father in defence of the view that time was created by God along with all other creatures. How will Klapwijk's witness hold up under intense cross examination? Does Augustine really support Klapwijk? Are there perhaps unforeseen consequences of this alleged support or maybe there is actually a lack of agreement between the two Christian philosophers? These are the questions for which I want to find an answer in this contribution to the examination of Klapwijk's admirable book. In the two sections of this essay which follow, I will seek to understand Augustine's view on these two issues. This cross-examination will, I believe, turn out to be rather critical of Klapwijk's case. And so, in a final section I will provide an initial outline of a rebuttal in which I argue that at a deeper level Klapwijk may rightly call his position on the two issues Augustinian.

### 1. *Fides quaerens intellectum*

Klapwijk is convinced that the right approach to dealing with the question of science and religion is to start with faith. It forms the outer hermeneutical circle for interpreting reality. Hence the formula: "faith seeking understanding." He takes his cue from Augustine, although the Church Father is not the originator of the formula, but his medieval student Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109).

Augustine frequently calls upon his listeners or readers to believe in order to understand (*crede, ut intelligas*). He can also do the opposite and summon them to understand in order to believe (*intellege, ut credas*) but this latter call remains subservient to the former one.<sup>2</sup> As Klapwijk notes, the bishop of Hippo finds biblical proof for the summons to believe in the words of Isaiah who, in the Old Latin translation which he used, states: "if you will not believe, you shall not understand" (Is. 7: 9).<sup>3</sup> Faith is for him not the end of the search for truth; it is the way to a full understanding of it.

That search for truth was for Augustine an intensely personal pursuit, which led him at last, in his thirty and second year, to an acceptance of the Christian faith. At the age of nineteen he was first set afire for the love of wisdom when he had to read Cicero's *Hortensius* in the course of his studies. He then began to immerse himself in the other liberal arts next to rhetoric, the one he was studying. He was looking for true philosophy and he thought he found it in the Manichean sect. After being an auditor of this sect during some years, he became disillusioned by its esoteric tenets and nurtured sympathy for the scepticism of the New Academy. He was suddenly healed from what he calls "this despair of finding the truth" when, in reading a Latin translation of the *Enneads* of Plotinus (205 – 270 A.D.) he had a mystical experience (see his *Confessions* book VII, 16ff.). This Neoplatonic experience prepared him for an

<sup>2</sup> Thus, *Sermo 43* ends with the call "Understand, in order to believe, my word; believe, in order to understand, the word of God."

<sup>3</sup> See *Purpose*, 195 n. 3. There is also that other reading of which Augustine was aware: "if you will not believe, you shall not be established." See *Teaching Christianity* II, 17.