THE PAULINE INFLUENCE ON AUGUSTINE'S NOTION OF THE WILL

BY

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It was no accident that a copy of Paul's Epistles lay on the table in the Garden of Milan when Augustine was converted to Christianity in 386. It was even less accidental that Augustine opened the Epistles for guidance at the height of his intense experience. Augustine had been reading Paul's Epistles during those feverish days in Milan and his interest in Paul certainly deepened after his conversion. This interest bore fruit in a number of commentaries which Augustine wrote on some of the Epistles and in the frequency with which he cites Paul throughout his early works. Augustine's interpretations of some of Paul's texts have a direct bearing on Augustine's notion of the will. Augustine relied on Paul for some crucial initial insights on the will and then Augustine greatly extended and deepened his own analysis far beyond Paul's texts. In the first part of this paper, Augustine's commentaries on Paul will be discussed with particular reference to those texts that influenced Augustine's notion of the will. These commentaries were written over a two-year period from 394-396. In the second part of this paper, it will be shown how Augustine took Paul's insights and developed them, especially as he wrote of his conversion experience in Confessions VIII (397-401). Paul provided Augustine with the preliminary language and concepts in the Epistles. To this Augustine added the decisive experience of his conversion, in particular what he had discovered about the will in the Garden of Milan.

Augustine on Paul's Epistles

Paul's Epistles were receiving a great deal of attention during the last decades of the fourth century and so it is not surprising that Augustine wrote commentaries on Paul for his fellow clerics and for educated laypersons of his day. In his work Augustine of Hippo, Peter Brown comments that "the last decades of the fourth century in the Latin
church, could well be called 'the generation of S. Paul': a common interest in S. Paul drew together widely differing thinkers, and made them closer to each other than to their predecessors." In the area of Pauline interpretation, Augustine had been preceded in print by Marius Victorinus (a Christian Platonist), by Ambrosiaster in Italy, and by the Donatist layman Tyconius in Africa. The Manichaeans had also commented extensively on Paul. For example, during the public debate between Augustine and Fortunatus (a Manichaean priest) in 392, it is interesting to note that it is Fortunatus who first draws Paul into the lists in support of his position against Augustine. Interest in Paul's Epistles was growing and Augustine very much added to this popular interest with his own work on Paul during these years. In the course of this work, Augustine's thinking moved in serious and important directions, especially his thinking on the will. Two of these works are of particular significance for understanding Augustine's notion of the will, namely, Exposition of Certain Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans (394-395) and Various Questions to Simplicianus (396). Brief reference will also be made to Augustine's commentary on Galatians, Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians (394).

The most important passage in Paul which influenced Augustine's thinking on the will occurs in Paul's Epistle to the Romans 7:7-25. This passage is referred to by Augustine in many of his early works, but the most extensive analyses are contained in the Exposition of Romans and in To Simplicianus. Though these two works are in substantial agreement, To Simplicianus which is the later work, is a longer and more developed exegesis of Romans 7:7-25 than that which appears in the Exposition of Romans. For our present discussion, the main focus will be on To Simplicianus (First Question) with ampliative reference to the Exposition of Romans and the Exposition of Galatians.

Few passages in Paul's Epistles have received such frequent, extensive, varying and contradictory explanations as has the passage in Romans 7:7-25. Augustine's explanation has become an important part of the history of the exegesis of this text. From his explanation we shall extract those insights which contribute to his notion of the will, using his argument To Simplicianus as the focus of the present analysis.

In the first six sections of the first question of To Simplicianus, Augustine sets out his explanation of the relationship between the law and sin in terms of the historical situation of mankind. According to Augustine, there are four distinct conditions of man in history: first, the