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Christian Nadeau, *Le vocabulaire de saint Augustin*. Paris: Ellipses, 2001. Pp. 63. ISBN 2-7298-0780-2.

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Word count: 804 words

'Il semble pour le moins naïf de prétendre présenter l'ensemble du corpus augustinien par l'intermédiaire d'un lexique d'une soixantaine de pages'. This is the first sentence of a new, small lexicon on Augustine, compiled by Christian Nadeau (N.), and beforehand most readers will readily agree. How could the vast oeuvre of the Church Father ever be summarized in so small a space?

The unexpected conciseness of the book appears to be due to the format of the series of which it forms part. In this series, called 'Vocabulaire de...', the basic teachings of famous philosophers (from Aristotle to Kant, Hegel, Marx and Merlau-Ponty) are illustrated by means of the most significant key words relevant to their thinking.

One would expect the editors to aim only at a very general audience of students and readers of philosophy and theology. In this book, however, N. also explicitly addresses himself to specialists of late antiquity and readers who are well versed in Augustine's thought. Again, this seems a huge claim for a book of only 60 pages!

The shortness of the book allows me to give a full list of the lemmata, in the exact form in which they are given in the book (but without the italics): âme (anima, animus, spiritus, mens); amour, désir (appetere); autorité (auctoritas); béatitude (beatitudo, beata vita, fruitio Dei); beau; bien (bonum); charité (caritas; dilectio proximi); cités; cogito; concupiscence (concupiscentia, cupiditas, libido, péché); Dieu; distension de l'âme (distensio animi [sic!]); éternité (immortalité); être (esse, essentia, natura); fin (telos); grâce; jouissance et utilité (fruiti); justice; liberté, libre arbitre; loi naturelle (lex naturalis); maître intérieur; mal; Manichéisme; mémoire; ordre (ordo); passions (passiones); Pélagianisme; philosophie; raison (oratio); région de dissemblance (regio dissimilitudinis); sagesse; signe (signum, verbum, nomen, res); temps; Trinité; verbe; vérité; volonté.

All 37 lemmata are divided into three parts, reflecting three levels of philosophical difficulty. The first part (marked with one asterisk) contains a working definition, and is meant for the beginning student; the second one (two asterisks) reflects a more scientific approach of the theme, and aims at advanced students; the third part (three asterisks) is described by N. in rather vague terms as a more free approach allowing for a broader interpretation, for instance on the echoes of a term within the context of the whole oeuvre.

Let me give one example, the lemma on the 'word' (verbe). Level 1 distinguishes between the human and the divine word, the latter being an image of God himself. The human word reflects human thought, and, by analogy, anything that approaches or corresponds to the principle of love, as it is established among the creatures of God. Level 2 describes how the Word for Augustine is the principle of truth and represents God. Three passages from

Augustine are briefly quoted for further thought: it is impossible to imitate the divine word in an adequate way; truth may only be seen in its manifestations, that is, where something is existent rather than nonexistent; whatever exists comes closer to the truth of the divine word in as much as it imitates the truth of the divine word. Finally, level 3 briefly argues that the human word proceeds from the divine word, and that all truth found by man comes from the teaching of his 'inner master', and so that every act of reason is in essence an act of belief or an act of love for God. (The whole lemma takes one page.)

As the above summary shows, matters are quickly brought to a fairly abstract philosophical level. It is also clear that N. focuses almost exclusively on philosophical aspects. Much could be added, for instance, on the Word as a symbol of human communication, on which Augustine has written several remarkable passages. Finally, the treatment of this lemma is typical for the systematic approach in the lexicon: every concept is seen as part of a closed system directed towards God, and there seems to be no place for any criticism or unsettling questions whatsoever.

Having said this, the choice of lemmata also seems to reflect this concern of presenting Augustine only as great thinker of a coherent system. One misses lemmata which might have tackled more debatable issues, such as predestination or the use of force, or, to add the inevitable items: women, sex, and the body.

Readers are thus presented an Augustine who does not seem to be a polemical thinker of flesh and blood, raising problems and putting questions, but a rather abstract inventor of what looks like eternal truth beyond discussion. Accordingly, I doubt whether the lexicon will stimulate many readers in their reading of Augustine. Personally I would not suggest it as introductory reading for my students in the department of classics. Those, however, who are interested in the relation between philosophy and theology may find some useful points in it.