

2005

# Augustine on Reading Culture

Center for Catholic, Studies Seton Hall University

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# *Augustine on Reading Culture*

2005 Summer Seminar  
Center for Catholic Studies  
Seton Hall University

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new;

late have I loved Thee!

For behold Thou went within me, and I outside;  
and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell  
upon those lovely things that Thou hast made.

Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee.

I was kept from Thee by those things,

yet had they not been in Thee,

they would not have been at all.

Thou didst call and cry to me and break open my deafness:

and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine

upon me and chase away my blindness;

Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me,

and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee:

I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee:

Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.

~Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10, 27

**D**edicated to the memory of the many faculty who have gone before us.  
Particularly, we remember those faculty who have died in the years 2004 through 2006.

Monsignor Andrew Cusack, *International Institute for Clergy Formation, Immaculate Conception Seminary*

John P. Deehan, *Professor Emeritus, Stillman School of Business*

Florence Hargett, *Professor Emerita, College of Nursing*

Monsignor John H. Koenig, *Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary*

Monsignor Joseph C. Manz, *Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary*

Monsignor Edward G. Price, *Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary*

Guillermo Sanchez, *Professor Emeritus, College of Arts and Sciences*

Nicholas Chirovsky, *Professor Emeritus, Department of Economics*

Reverend Eugene J. Cotter, *Assistant Professor, Department of Classical Studies*

Reverend Arnold De Rosa, *Professor Emeritus, College of Education and Human Services*

John F.X. Irving, *Dean Emeritus, Seton Hall Law School*

Howard T. Ludlow, *Professor Emeritus, Department of Management*

Umberto Gennaro Marino, *Professor Emeritus, Department of English*

Peter Wallace Rodino Jr., *Professor, Seton Hall University Law School*

Authur Santucci, *Professor Emeritus, College of Education and Human Services*

Reverend Donald C. Smith, *Professor Emeritus, Department of Modern Languages*

Vernon Williams, *Professor, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science*

Sarah Patrylow, *Professor, College of Nursing*

Gerard M. Carey, *Professor Emeritus, Seton Hall University Law School*

Gordon Dippel, *Professor Emeritus, Stillman School of Business*

Proceedings of the  
Center for Catholic Studies

*Augustine on Reading Culture*  
Summer Seminar 2005



South Orange, New Jersey

# INTRODUCTION

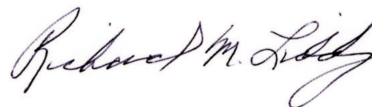
These essays from the Center for Catholic Studies 2005 Faculty Summer Seminar express the thoughts and feelings of 17 Seton Hall University faculty members responding to *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*.

The seminar was facilitated by Professor John Cavadini, chair of the Theology Department at the University of Notre Dame, who took us through a close reading of the text of *The Confessions*. Each of us responded to the text from our own history and our own horizon. And we responded to each other. As in past summer seminars, community was created, and each of us took another turn in our journey of transformation. As one past participant wrote in her evaluation:

The faculty seminar hosted by the Center for Catholic Studies has been the best faculty development program at Seton Hall ... .The time frame gives it the right level of informality and intensity. It is a good mix of intellectual stimulation and personal reflection. The strength of the seminar is that it builds community among the faculty in the common pursuit of knowledge. There are very few occasions to experience this fellowship of learning that is the ideal of university life. Hats off to the Center for Catholic Studies for providing the taste of the best of academic life.

The order of the essays in these proceedings represent a movement from Augustine's own religious conversion through his moral and his intellectual transformation, culminating in the social, cultural and political implications of his thought.

Finally I would like to thank a number of persons for their help in bringing this book to publication: David Foster and the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership for supporting this faculty seminar; Catherine Phelan, Lisa Haddock, Lorraine Joyce and Greg Tobin for all their work in coordinating and editing this book; the publications department of Seton Hall; Danute Nourse and Gloria Garafulich-Grabois from the Center for Catholic Studies and the Chesterton Institute for all their behind-the-scenes help; and finally, Professor Anthony Sciglitano for organizing the seminar.



Richard M. Liddy  
*Director, Center for Catholic Studies*

## SEMINAR ANNOUNCEMENT

# “Augustine on Reading Culture”

### Faculty Summer Seminar

Monday-Wednesday, May 17-19, 2005

Facilitator: John Cavadini, Ph.D  
Chair Department of Theology  
Notre Dame University

Seton Hall University faculty are invited to take part in a seminar on the writings of Saint Augustine and particularly his *Confessions*.

The seminar will feature Augustine as a theorist of language and culture, perhaps with some unexpected results. Augustine will appear by turns as a progenitor of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” — Paul Ricoeur’s term — and as a creator of what one might call a hermeneutics of the imagination in his reflection on the sources of cultural renewal. The seminar will aim at a kind of theological history of culture and will also aim to show how Augustine’s ideas were received through the ages. In the context of Seton Hall’s own work on a new core curriculum, the seminar will also present some ideas on the process of interpretation and exposition and will follow a method of shared inquiry.

John Cavadini, Ph.D. is the chair of the Theology Department at the University of Notre Dame. Among his publications are *The Last Christology of the West* (Philadelphia, 1993); *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (Notre Dame, 1995); *Who Do You Say That I Am?: Christology for a New Millennium* (Notre Dame, 2004), and articles in various journals and books on various topics in St. Augustine and on other topics. His article from the April 8, 2004 edition of *Commonweal*, “Ignorant Catholics,” will be the subject of an afternoon reflection on the place of Catholic theology in Catholic universities.

Participating faculty will be expected to discuss certain texts and are asked to write a short article about the topic from their own perspective and discipline. The organizer of the seminar is Anthony Scigliano from the Religious Studies Department.



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# AUGUSTINE AND THE CONTINUING NEED FOR GRACE

by Nancy Enright

*Let not the proud speak evil of me, for my thoughts are on the price of my redemption; I eat it and drink it and give it to others to eat and drink, and being poor myself, I desire to be satisfied by it among those that eat and are satisfied, and they shall praise the Lord who seek him.*

( *The Confessions*, Book 10:43, page 256).

Recently I attended the seminar on Saint Augustine of Hippo offered by Seton Hall's Catholic Studies Department and led by John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame. This seminar was enormously interesting, and I found myself thinking and re-thinking about Augustine in many ways. Having always focused on Augustine's great transformation, culminating in his experience in the garden, I had not considered enough his explicit and repeated mentioning of the ongoing need for grace, after conversion. The seminar has helped me to get a clearer sense of this concept of ongoing grace, both in understanding Augustine and in my own personal life.

As Cavadini emphasized, pride — not sexual sin — is at the heart of what the pre-Christian Augustine had to renounce. His sexual weakness, though important and perhaps most difficult to abandon, was not his most significant or basic sin. Pride, exhibited in Augustine's and his scholarly mentors' incessant quest for "being the best" in an academic setting, is the deadly sin that most endangers a soul. As Cavadini mentioned, the pride Augustine must move beyond is, essentially, an attempt to make oneself, not God, the ultimate reference point. A brilliant student, young Augustine was strongly encouraged by his parents, particularly his emotionally absent and ambitious father, to excel as a rhetorician, as he says in Book 2:4 "that I might attain proficiency in literature," a desire that, according to Augustine, "both of my parents indulged too much — my father, because he hardly thought of you [i.e. God] at all and only thought in the most trivial way about me. ... " (44). He goes on to say that his mother, the saintly Monica, indulged in these hopes with an idea that Augustine's studies might lead him to conversion. His professors also, even from his boyhood, encouraged him in the same pursuit of prideful success. Augustine says:

These studies of mine also, which were considered perfectly respectable, were designed to fit me for the law so that I might gain a great name in a profession where those who deceive most people have the biggest reputations. Such is the blindness of men, that blindness should become an actual source of pride! And by now I was a senior student in the School of Rhetoric and very pleased with myself and proud and swelling with arrogance ... (3:3, page 55).

From this atmosphere Augustine develops into a mature man, a professor of rhetoric, a position he would hold until his conversion at the age of 33.

Most of us have probably read and almost all of us have heard about Augustine's famous conversion experience in the garden. Just prior to the crucial moment when Augustine heard the child's voice saying "take and read, take and read," he spent time agonizing over his inability to let go of his physical/sexual indulgences. "Violence of habit," he confesses, "spoke the words: 'Do you think that you can live without them?'" (8:12, 181). However, a vision of personified Continence, answered this question by means of another: "Why do you try and stand by yourself, and so not stand at all. Let Him support you. Do not be afraid. He will not draw away and let you fall ... "A key phrase is "try and stand by yourself," indicating Augustine's continued reliance on the self. In other words, even his conversion, so deeply connected with his renunciation of sexual sin, is really — perhaps more deeply — a renunciation of pride and an act of surrender to grace.

"Late it was that I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late I loved you!" (10:26, 235). In Augustine's famous lines, he expresses joy in his new life. Certainly he enters into a new kind of peace upon his conversion. As he describes it,

"Now my mind was free of those gnawing cares that came from ambition and the desire for gain and wallowing in filth and scratching the itching scab of lust. And now I was talking to you easily and simply, my brightness and my riches and my health, my Lord God" (9:2, 185).

Despite the ineffable sweetness of his new life, Augustine found that he was not yet perfect, still struggling with sin. Echoing Saint Paul in Romans 7, Augustine says,

"But my sad weight makes me fall back again; I am swallowed up by normality; I am held fast and heavily do I weep, but heavily I am held. So much are we weighed down by the burden of custom! Here I have the power but not the wish to stay; there I wish to be but cannot; both ways, miserable" (10:41, 253).

Cavadini pointed out to the group that passages like this one, from the converted and baptized Augustine, offended Pelagius, who taught the heresy that we can be saved by our own efforts, through our own free will. Augustine, in his nearly obsessive self-scrutiny, knows this is not possible. We are absolutely dependent upon grace, not only during conversion but after it.

This concept, of the necessity of grace after conversion, is probably the one thing I will most remember from the seminar. On a personal note, it is an issue with which I have struggled. Having experienced a conversion of my own, in my youth, I have been aware (and at times dismayed) at how I have needed to re-convert myself, applying my faith to new situations and challenges, aware of areas needing to be healed by grace, falling and rising again. I have often thought of Augustine as fortunate for having experienced what to me seemed so clear-cut and final in his garden *metanoia*. Until now, I must not have read those latter books of *The Confessions* with enough care! Clearly, Augustine is offering hope to any believer who feels the need for continuing conversion, for the ongoing need for grace.

*The Confessions* is not simply the narrative of how a man came to God but the story of how we can all live in God. The most saintly person stands in need of grace. Augustine makes this point very clearly when he discusses his mother, Monica. In Augustine's recollections of his mother, she appears as a deeply spiritual, holy person. He speaks of her intense devotion, her personal gentleness combined with spiritual strength. Her prayers and influence clearly were an extremely important factor in Augustine's own conversion, and her pagan husband, Patricius, was brought to the faith shortly before his death through her faith and influence. However, even Monica was not perfect, even in the eyes of her deeply devoted and repentant son. After telling the story of her life and death, he expresses, in a moving passage, his own "tears that well up from a spirit shaken by the thoughts of the dangers that threaten every soul that *dieth in Adam*." He explains,

Certainly she, after having been made alive in Christ and when still not freed from the flesh, lived such a life that in her faith and in her character your name was praised; yet even so I would not venture to say that from the time of her regeneration by you in baptism she never let fall a single word that was contrary to your commandment ... (Book 9:13, 207).

Essentially, he entrusts her to God's mercy. Augustine applies the theological concept that comforts him with regard to his mother to all people. He says,

... [I]t would go badly indeed with any man, however praiseworthy his life, if you were to lay aside your mercy before examining it. But because you do not look too rigorously into our sins, we

confidently hope to find some place with you. But if a man recounts to you all the real merits he has, he is only telling you of your gifts to him. **If only men would recognize that they are men, and that he that glorieth, would glory in the Lord [emphasis added]** (9:13, 207).

The preceding line goes back to the premise with which Cavadini started the seminar: salvation consists in recognizing our reality as creatures, utterly dependent upon God, not only for our salvation but for our existence. Conversion does not change this dependence. We need “to live and move and have our being” in God (Acts 17:28), relying on his grace. Our continuing weakness and sin place us in the position of a continuing need for grace. As Cavadini said, in the Eucharist “obsession [i.e. with our own sinfulness] becomes confession.” Certainly, this is what happened in the case of Augustine.

The result of reliance on grace, paradoxically, is good works, but they must always be seen as a gift. Describing the life of the converted soul, Augustine says,

And she brings forth her fruit, and at your command, the command of her Lord God, our soul blossoms with works of mercy, *according to their kind, loving our neighbor* in the relief of his bodily necessities, *having seed in itself according to its likeness*, since from our own weakness we feel compassion for others and are ready to help those in want, helping them as we ourselves would wish to be helped if we were in the same need ... (13:18, 328-329).

As in the case with the smallest child, a sense of being loved leads to loving; this is the essence of grace.

### **Work Cited**

Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions*. Trans. Rex Warner. New York: Mentor/Penguin, 1963. (Note: Warner italicizes Augustine's quoting from the Scriptures.) The New American Standard Bible. La Habra, Calif.: The Lockman Foundation, 1977

# THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: AUGUSTINE AND MARGERY KEMPE

by Patrice Thoms-Cappello

In a study of autobiography, St. Augustine's *Confessions* is the Ur text, the place where students of the genre study the narrated self, re-present in the text. Here, the man who has been characterized as the most fully realized reader of the ancient and classical world becomes the ultimate subject of the modern one — even as he places this new self in subject position to the Creator. All subsequent writers stand in Augustine's shadow, even when, as with Jean Jacques Rousseau, they turn away. Whether conscious spiritual testamentary writing of the early Quakers and other dissenters, the soaring celebratory output of the novelistic 19th century, or modern fragmentary pictorial records of an artist such as Charlotte Salomon, conscious recording of the Western self leads backward to Augustine.

How then are we to regard the relatively new discovery of a spiritual autobiography sealed, as it were, in a vacuum away from our carefully developed ideas about the poetics of Western autobiography? Found in 1934, purported to be the record of Margery Kempe (circa 1374-1440), an Englishwoman from East Anglia whose life journey was lived as spiritual quest, *The Book of Margery Kempe* stands as the record left to “offer sinful wretches consolation . . . of the mercy of our sovereign Savior Jesus Christ” (Skinner 14). Unknown except as the barest fragments collected and printed by Wynken de Worde in 1501 (who thought her an earlier anchorite), Margery's full account remained hidden in the estate library of the Butler-Bowdon family for nearly four centuries. As lost, the book does not influence subsequent narratives. As copied and annotated by a monk from an original text told to two different recorders by a woman who could neither read nor write in her own Middle English dialect, the artifact presents problems of textual honesty, questions of authorial integrity, and countless opportunities for academic writing. Those of use who teach and try to re-create the historic record are charmed by the existence and discovery of a book so earnestly recorded and so long lost. Those of us who teach women's writing are not surprised, having often studied newly regarded earlier writers like the 19th century's Margaret Oliphant, who was herself busily engaged in the task of unearthing forgotten women writers from the early 17th.

Still, this text is distinguished by its purpose and focus from even the earliest household accounts and diaries now studied. While she had neither intellectual development nor authority of place, Kempe's homely, wandering, repetitive account is intriguing for the very similarity of her personal tale to those of more learned Christians who lived before and after her, even Augustine. She too has her dark night of the soul, an experience that to contemporary readers reads as a textbook case of postpartum depression. She thought her soul lost to the devil until Jesus appeared to her. Different of course from Augustine's spiritual disease recounted and focused in Book 4 in the death of his friend, but that tale has its own template recounted from the earliest tales of Gilgamesh to Achilles and reprised even by John Henry Newman with John Keble in the 19th century. Augustine himself in explaining his useless bitterness alludes to the tale of Orestes and Pylades to explain this slough of despond, devoid as it is at this point of the faith he later finds. Margery's despair is fueled by her very physical response to the body's loss through childbirth, its own template, and provides the same fertile ground for despair or hope.

Just as Augustine, when yearning for faith, still sought the material success available as rhetorician in Rome, Margery, after her first decision to become God's servant, is still prideful enough to crave attention through showy dress and public acclaim. As a brewer in Lynn, now King's Lynn, she finds the Lord but later remarks she had actually learned nothing because she continued to sin. The emptiness of her mercantile pursuit is not immediately understood, but in the retelling, Margery takes another step toward leaving the things of this world behind. So too, her immoderation in physical delights as she is beset by her own excessive love of food and attractions toward other men. She continues to confess her sins of lechery for at least a year, still “troubled by horrible temptations of the flesh and by despair” (36), wondering whether God has forsaken her.

Even as she passes through this trial and lives a moderate married life, she continues to desire to live a chaste one. However, unlike Augustine who also knows he must embrace celibacy some time before he does, Margery's desire is compounded by her married state. For her there is no metatext, no echoes of Aeneas slipping away from Carthage as with Augustine. Margery relates, "I was prompted in my soul to visit certain places for my spiritual good ... but I was not free to do so without my husband's consent" (46). She travels to shrines and he accompanies her.

Confronted by her conflicting desires to be celibate and still obedient to her husband, she reaches another place on her spiritual path as he continues to assert his rights of marriage. Margery Kempe cannot take up and read Saint Paul, nor does she need to. Instead, she asks her husband whether she may pray first and in her contemplation engages in conversation with Jesus; she knows she has been counseled to be obedient to her husband and assured that, by this token, he will agree to go to a bishop to bless her desire for a single life. Three years later he agrees, she says, to "give me back the freedom of my body" (49), allowing her to embark on her own life of prayer and pilgrimage throughout Europe and the Holy Lands.

Just as the reader must get past the muddied field worked by the original scribe and subsequent translators, in her own lifetime Margery's quest for union of her self with her Savior is mediated through her husband and her confessors, those in charge of her physical and spiritual self on earth. Indeed, though living apart from her husband, she still needed to care for him in his last years.

It is, of course, addiction, and their ultimate cure. In subsequent Western Christianity, pride is construed differently than in Augustine; we tend to view any affirmation of self and/or a positive self-image as "prideful." But Augustine considers *superbia* as any form of self-sufficiency, as any attempt to see one's self rather than God as the source of life. As Cavadini points out, pride is not a thought, but is a way of being; it is not only a personal sin, but is also the origin of sin. Thus all deformation of human willing is a form of this sin of *superbia*. Indeed, the insistence on improper willing destroys the self as God intended it to be and is therefore irrational.

Even though Margery Kempe was testifying, as with many of the later Quaker and dissenting writers, out of a compulsion to do as the Lord bid, to speak without mediation and with certainty, her story parallels later Protestant texts more in its narrative structure than in its departure from seeking authority to speak out. Cyclical rather than linear, dependent on the teller who lived in a mostly oral culture, Margery's and the later tracts share an insistence often belied or undercut by a dire lack of authorial mastery. It is partly this lack of any coherent narrative frames that makes Kempe's book like those others, an account where the surety of the spoken or recorded self as saved often feels momentary rather than final and fixed as does Augustine's voice in Book 10.

While she did depend more on interior meditation than some of her spiritual advisers would have liked, unlike subsequent dissenters Margery Kempe did not reject the supremacy of Church doctrine or authority. Her constant desire to meditate on her visions was, as John Skinner suggests, the "prayer of active and affective imagination ... popularized in England by Anselm and Aelred" (9). And if, unlike Augustine, she could not settle into a life of writing, preaching and Church leadership, Margery Kempe could and did still live as witness to her faith. By securing permission to wear the white of chastity, to attend Church even when weeping aloud, and to travel the world of Christendom as a pilgrim, she made of her very body the book that was Margery Kempe.

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Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. John K. Ryan, trans. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960.

# AUGUSTINE AND ADDICTION, CONFESSION(S) AND HEALING

by Charles E. Carter

I came to the seminar on Augustine's *Confessions* with only a passing acquaintance with (but not a passable knowledge of) this great doctor of the church. I had read small excerpts of both *The Confessions* and *City of God*, studied elements of his thought in church history and theology courses, read a biography, but had done no in-depth study. I knew him to be the source of much of the theological reflection foundational to the Catholic and Protestant traditions and as the originator of the "introspective conscience of the West."<sup>1</sup> So I was very pleased to be able to attend the Catholic Studies seminar on *The Confessions* of Saint Augustine and to be led through the work in John Cavadini's literarily nuanced and historically enriched presentation.

I would like to focus on two aspects of this great work that surprised me as I encountered them: first, the nature of *The Confessions* themselves, and second, Augustine's insights on addiction, its causes and cures. The two are, in fact, directly connected. Many Protestants, especially those from a lower church background, have only a passing understanding of confession itself. Confession is something one does individually before God — or for the really big sins — in the privacy of one's pastor's study or therapist's office. Sometimes it makes an appearance in the liturgy of Holy Communion, along with an assurance of pardon. But even this is not universal. As I have moved toward a more sacramental orientation, I have sometimes even wished that we low-church Protestants would expand the number of sacraments and truly accept them as means of grace! Still, confession has aura of morbidity and even an unhealthy preoccupation with sin, human frailty, and imperfection.

This runs counter to Augustine's *Confessions*, which focuses primarily on proclaiming God's goodness and mercy as the starting point of Christian spirituality. Rather than being primarily a confession of Augustine's sins and sinful tendencies — though these are copiously chronicled even from his actions as an infant — they are from beginning to end his confession of faith, his proclamation about the nature of God. Although Augustine does reflect deeply on his own failures — punctuated by expressions of remorse and more than a little self-loathing — he does so with praise and gratitude for God's love and grace.

One of the most fascinating discussions of the seminar concerned the interrelationships among *superbia* (pride), addiction, and their ultimate cure. In subsequent Western Christianity, pride is construed differently than in Augustine; we tend to view any affirmation of self and/or a positive self-image as "prideful." But Augustine considers *superbia* as any form of self-sufficiency, as any attempt to see one's self rather than God as the source of life. As Cavadini points out, pride is not a thought, but is a way of being; it is not only a personal sin, but is also the origin of sin. Thus all deformation of human willing is a form of this sin of *superbia*. Indeed, the insistence on improper willing destroys the self as God intended it to be and is therefore irrational.

Ultimately, this love of one's own will, this deformation of the true self, functions as an addiction, which may be defined as an attachment to any thought or behavior that is destructive. Reflecting on his act of stealing pears, Augustine says:

... our pleasure lay in doing that which was not allowed. ... I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul and I loved it. *I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself.* ... I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means but shame for its own sake (Book 2:4.9, italics added).

This understanding of the relationship between addiction and the deforming of one's self and one's will is similar to the view of many twelve-step programs: that one of the characteristics of an addict is "self-will run riot." Of course, modern concepts of addiction add to Augustine's insight into *superbia* and improper willing the belief that many addictions are chemically based. They result from some combination of chemical dependency and differences in the addict's internal chemical and/or biological makeup.

For Augustine and addicts ancient and modern, the cure is the same: reclaiming one's authentic self and the transformation of one's will through a commitment to renewed spirituality. One's obsession with radical self-sufficiency, or with one's self over against God, is irrational. But that obsession can only be lifted when one surrenders and sees God, not the self, as the source of life. When one is in the grip of the deformed, irrational, and improperly centered self, one can only compete with God as the author of life; in that state, gratitude to anyone else, let alone a power outside of oneself is impossible. Gripped by this addiction to self or substance, acknowledging God would be unbearable, praising God unfathomable.

Yet, Augustine sees replacing *superbia* with humility, destructive willing with gratitude and praise of God as the beginning of healing. If, as Cavadini suggests, "we obsessively seek that which would destroy us," then it follows that we cannot free ourselves — we become free only as God frees us. It is grace that restores us to be able to will correctly, to reclaim our true selves; it is grace that released Augustine, and releases us, from our obsessions and our addictions. This grace is revealed in the Incarnation; in the Eucharist and the Eucharistic life, we remember and experience God's mercy. Again, each of these experiences of renewal and restoration lead us, with Augustine, to a place of gratitude and thanksgiving, a space where we, like Augustine, can confess God's place as God and confess God's goodness. True release, recovery, and serenity, Augustine might say, come only when our restless hearts find their rest in the Holy One.

### Note

1. See the influential article by K. Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" (*Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215; reprinted in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976): 78-96.



# THREE CONCEPTIONS OF THE IRRATIONALITY OF SIN FROM BOOK 2 OF THE CONFESSIONS

by Stan R. Tyvoll

Of the many fascinating discussions at the seminar, I was especially mesmerized by the one on Augustine and the irrationality of sin. What does it mean to say that sin is irrational? We can conceive of the irrationality of sin in different ways, and I think there are at least three distinct conceptions of the irrationality of sin in Augustine's descriptions of sin in Book 2 of *The Confessions*. In what follows, I try to make these three conceptions of the irrationality of sin more explicit.

First, sin is irrational because it is the *love of self-destruction*. Recollecting the night that he and his gang of adolescents stole pears from a neighbor's tree, Augustine says that he "loved the self-destruction" and loved the fall (4.9). I will not get into Augustine's reasons for thinking that sin is the love of self-destruction. Suffice it to say that it is commonplace to regard the desire for self-destruction as the height of irrationality. Of course, people sometimes destroy themselves, or allow themselves to be destroyed, in order to help someone else, perhaps to save someone's life. But in such cases the person is moved by the desire to help another, not by the desire to destroy himself. Thus, since the desire for self-destruction is irrational, and since sin is the desire for self-destruction, sin is irrational.

Second, sin is irrational because we *love it for its own sake*. Several times in Book 2, Augustine makes the point that we love sin for its own sake. For example, he writes, "I had no motive for my wickedness except the wickedness itself . . . I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake" (4.9). Later, referring to the pear incident, he speaks of the theft as that "in which I loved nothing but the theft itself" (8.16).

Augustine recognizes the obvious fact that people sin out of desires for things other than the sin itself. For example, a man might murder "because he loved another's wife or his property; or he wanted to acquire money to live on by plundering his goods; or he was afraid of losing his own property by the action of his victim; or he had suffered injury and burned with desire for revenge" (5.11). Augustine is aware of the fact that he stole the pears out of desires for things other than the sin itself. He admits that he derived pleasure from being associated with a gang, and pleasure in the excitement of doing something "for a giggle" (9.17). He also wanted to avoid the embarrassment of looking like a coward if he did not participate in the theft (9.17). So, clearly, Augustine thinks that we desire sin because we see that sin is a *means to an end*, a means to satisfying desires for things that are extrinsic to the sin itself.

The remarkable thing about sin, though, is that we also desire it *for its own sake*, as an *end in itself*. And this is the second way that sin is irrational. While it may not be irrational to desire sin for the sake of something else, it is irrational to desire sin for its own sake. The reason that desiring sin for its own sake is irrational is found in Augustine's neoplatonic assumption that sin, and all other forms of evil, have no being. Evil is the absence or privation of being. Referring to the theft of the pears, Augustine says, "There was nothing beautiful about you, my thieving. Indeed do you exist at all for me to be addressing you" (6.12)? Later, he says, "The theft itself was a nothing, and for that reason I was the more miserable" (8.16). Unlike the loveliness we find in the human mind, the stars, and the creatures of the earth and sea, there is no beauty, no perfection, and no excellence in the act of theft, or any other sin, because from a metaphysical standpoint sin is a "nothing." To desire that which is in itself utterly undesirable because, being nothing at all, it contains no desirable quality, is irrational. To love and seek nothingness is absurd. To desire for its own sake or as an end in itself that which *has* intrinsic worth and is an end in itself, such as knowledge and joy, is perfectly rational. But to desire as an end that which is no end at all is irrational.

Finally, sin is irrational because *nothing causes us* to sin. To say this does not mean that we have no reasons for sinning. As mentioned above, we sin from desires for something other than the sin itself. We would find it hard to believe the accusation that someone murdered, unless we could identify some motive, apart from murder itself, for which the person murdered (5.11). Even the brutal Catiline had motives for his savagery: "His objective was to capture the city by violent crimes to obtain honours, government, and wealth; to live without fear of the laws and without the difficulty of attaining his ambitions because of the poverty of his family estate and his known criminal record" (5.11). Augustine wouldn't have stolen the pears apart from the desire to be a member of a gang, and the desire to avoid being thought of as a coward.

But even though we would not sin apart from a desire for something besides the sin itself, it seems that Augustine's position is that these desires don't *cause* us to sin. If we have desires for something besides the sin itself, it doesn't follow that we *have* to sin; the desires don't make sin a necessary occurrence. I find it helpful to think of this in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Desire for something besides the sin itself is a necessary but insufficient condition for committing a sin. In other words, the sin would not occur apart from such desires; but granting that we have such desires, it doesn't follow that we must sin. Assuming that I'm interpreting Augustine correctly, his position is akin to the agent-causation theory of free will, according to which an agent may perform an action *because of* desires and motives, but those desires and motives do not, in a law-like fashion, cause the agent to perform the action. But now, if desire for something besides the sin itself does not cause us to sin, if we are free not to sin even when we have desire for something the sin could give us, then why do we sin? What causes us to sin?

Augustine's answer is that nothing causes us to sin. There is no causal explanation for it. In *City of God*, Book XII, Chapter 6, Augustine says, "If one seeks for the efficient cause of their evil will, none is to be found. For, what can make the will bad when it is the will itself which makes an action bad? Thus, an evil will is the efficient cause of a bad action, but there is no efficient cause of an evil will" (Baird and Kaufmann 130). Anselm of Canterbury, the 11th century Augustinian thinker, makes the same point at the end of *On the Fall of Satan*. In answering the question why Satan willed what he ought not to have willed, Anselm replies: "Only because he willed [it]. For this willing had no other cause (*causa*) by which in any respect to be driven or drawn; rather, it was an efficient cause of itself-if this can be said-and its own effect" (260). So no sin, whether the first sin of Satan, or any other sin that has followed, has an ultimate causal explanation outside of the will of the person who wills the sin. We may sin in the hope of fulfilling some desire external to the desire for sin itself; but such a desire does not cause the will to turn to what should not be willed (which is to sin); the will itself is the efficient cause of that turning.

This position on sin, it seems to me, makes sin irrational. If someone's will turns to what it shouldn't will in order to fulfill desires, but those desires don't cause the agent's will to turn, or if given those desires, her will does not have to turn towards what it shouldn't will, then I can see no ultimate reason why her will turned to what it shouldn't have willed. The reply that her will just turned itself, or caused its own turning, if that is even possible, doesn't solve anything. I'm still left with no ultimate answer as to why it did so. Another way of putting it: suppose an agent desires to fulfill, sinning would fulfill her desires, but the desires don't cause her to sin; well, why then does she will to fulfill those desires by turning her will toward what it ought not to will when she didn't have to do so? She didn't have to give in to those desires, but she did anyway, and for no reason at all, arbitrarily, so it seems. But if, for no ultimate reason, or arbitrarily, someone's will turns to what ought not to be willed, then its doing so could be characterized as an irrational event.

So there, then, are three conceptions of the irrationality of sin based primarily on Book 2 of *The Confessions*. Much more could be said about each conception, and I may be off the mark in my interpretation of Augustine. But one thing is for sure: trying to understand sin is like trying to untie an "extremely twisted and tangled knot," and is, indeed, "a foul affair" (10.18).

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# PRIDE AS PERSONAL AND POLITICAL: AUGUSTINE AND CAMUS ON SUPERBIA

By Anthony C. Sciglitano

Pride is the greatest temptation for the Christian precisely because it draws strength from the genuine Christian confession that human beings are made in the image of God and destined to share in God's own life. Of course what Christianity actually says is that both image and destiny are gifts of divine grace. Pride or *superbia* excises the gratuitous character of human nature and destiny, and permits the view that human beings are self-made, self-grounding beings. Pride turns image into idol, divine destiny into national mission. Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries and Albert Camus in the 20th are pathologists of pride; they uncover the many ways that it corrupts and deforms humanity in both the personal and political realms. It is expected that Augustine's analysis will be theological; it is perhaps surprising that Camus' is as well.<sup>1</sup> In the following essay, I will give a brief overview of their analyses of pride as it becomes both personal and political. It is my contention, which I can only point to here, that Camus' critique of modern revolutionary and ideological movements in his controversial 1951 book *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*) recapitulates for modern Europe much of Augustine's critique of the earthly city found in his magisterial work, *The City of God*. Our discussion here can only be on the order of aperçu and gesture, not anything like justification.

The sad irony of pride, Augustine suggests, is that it is rooted in a form of self-loathing. If pride is the desire to be self-grounding, that is, to be God, then pride also condemns and rejects our actual, creaturely being. For Augustine, it is to praise God that constitutes the true desire and joy of the creature. But praise as a form of confession is not some form of groveling for the crumbs of being that God has tossed our way. Instead, praise is the natural response from those who sense the goodness of the being that they receive. Augustine begins his *Confessions* in praise of God's greatness, and at the end of the first book he gives thanks: "My God, I give thanks to you . . . . The talents you have given will increase and be perfected, and I will be with you since it was your gift to me that I exist" (20.31). Gratitude is the cure for pride. Gratitude in turn presupposes humility, a sense that one is not God. The same contrasts and cures are developed early in *The City of God*. Augustine seeks to defend against detractors "[t]he glorious city of God," especially its "Founder." He seeks to "persuade the proud how great is the virtue of humility, which raises us . . . by a divine grace above all earthly dignities that totter on this shifting scene" (City, Book 1, preface). The biblical proclamation that God "resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" is recalled by Augustine at the beginning of both *The City of God* (Book 1, preface) and *The Confessions* (1:1.1). The model for this humility and exaltation is of course the Incarnation, recalled early in *The Confessions* when Augustine remembers that it is the "humanity of your Son," through a preacher, that has given him faith and that as a boy he had heard about "eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride . . ." (1:11.17).

The contrasting movement of pride and humility is instructive because it mirrors, I think, the contrast between the Neoplatonic ascent that Augustine achieves in Book 7 of *The Confessions*, and the grace that he receives in Book 8 when he throws himself upon divine mercy. The first, pride, is an attempt to rise up oneself, to storm the heavenly gates and gain knowledge of divine things. Augustine succeeds in attaining to the heights of this mystical ascent, but then is unable to sustain himself there and falls. Dejection follows, and it is in his dejection that the mercy of God comes to him. As Cavadini would say, Augustine rises to God's mercy, and no further. There is no ground beyond or behind divine love that one could grasp and use to explain the divine itself. From within the sphere of God's mercy, Augustine is able to truly confess, that is, to praise God and to speak the truth of his own sin. Mercy serves truth telling. Moreover, divine mercy fosters Augustine's ability to diagnose the multifarious ways in which pride manifests itself in his own culture, particularly in an educational system that values "success" above love of God and neighbor, and that places even marriage and child-rearing at the service of

the cultural project of prestige. He is also able to imagine a different kind of ascent, an ascent to God's mercy that results in a community of charity and solidarity sustained by God's descent.

The City of God develops the contrast between divine humility and human pride in the sphere of governance. Pride now means being "ruled by a lust of rule" (Book 1, preface). Pride distorts and disorders loves or attachments and therefore one's willing. As the root of sin, pride is the "craving for undue exaltation ... when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction" (14:13). The shine of the proud makes them seem bigger and more significant than others. However, Augustine argues that pride shrinks our humanity, cuts off transcendence, and begets a ruler who is small, contracted, and out for his own interests. Pride is the rebellion that destroys the rebel. The political consequences, Augustine believes, are profound. Pride can lead to all kinds of injustices including unjust war and a humanity untouched by war's ravages. While Augustine certainly believes that there are wars that are just, he also argues that even when fighting a just war, a person ought to be disturbed by the fact that human wrongdoing has created the need to fight a war. The claim here is one of human solidarity. Since we all share in the human race, we share in its triumphs and its evils. Thus even the just war is cause for lament. Augustine is worth quoting here: "Let everyone, then, who thinks with pain on all these great evils, so horrible, so ruthless, acknowledge that this is misery. And if any one either endures or thinks of them without mental pain, this is a more miserable plight still, for he thinks himself happy because he has lost human feeling" (City 19:7) By contrast, the humble receive exaltation, find God's love, and, as rulers, care for all subjects in God. Augustine puts the contrast starkly: "In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all" (14:28) Love of God broadens human love; love of self contracts it.

"The astonishing history evoked here," Camus writes near the beginning of *The Rebel*, "is the history of European pride" (11). Camus considers the disasters of the 20th century a culmination of what he labels "metaphysical rebellion," the revolt of thought against God. This is pride writ large and in red. Indeed, Camus rejects the common association of modernity with Prometheus, and substitutes instead the name Cain, the murderer provoked to killing by what some moderns consider a capricious God's distaste for his sacrifice. Insofar as rebellion is metaphysical, Camus argues, it is intrinsically associated with the personal Christian God who can be held responsible for the administration of all creation. Aside from such a universal monotheism, metaphysical rebellion does not occur (28). The theological analysis is fascinating. Camus argues that in the 18th century Jesus' resurrection and divinity come to seem contrary to reason. Thus the first theological step that justifies metaphysical rebellion is to cut off the story of Christ prior to the Resurrection. Rejection of the divinity of Christ makes Jesus just "one more innocent man whom the representatives of the God of Abraham tortured in a spectacular manner ... Thus the ground will be prepared for the great offensive against a hostile heaven" (34-35). God no longer shares in and transforms the suffering of his beloved creation, but comes to be seen as a capricious God who hands down a universal death penalty. It is against this picture of God, Camus argues, that modernity begins its rebellion on behalf of humanity; but it is likewise this rebellion that precipitates thought systems that make human history an end in itself, thus justifying mass murder in the name of this history, the future, utopia, and in the name of a divinized humanity. In other words, Camus wants to say that pride so turns everything on its head, that crime comes to be viewed as positive and justified in view of the perfect future that humanity will achieve: "The golden age, postponed until the end of history and coincident, to add to its attractions, with an apocalypse, therefore justifies everything. ... Utopia replaces God with the future" (207-208).<sup>2</sup> The praise of God that is the end of human existence for Augustine gives way to human self-love in its most destructive form.

Camus, of course, rejects the Promethean view of humanity. He finds in rebellion, as opposed to revolt, a genuine impetus towards human solidarity, compassion, justice, and love. But both rebellion and reason, he believes, must remain modest, sober, and free of mystification. This does not indicate a rapprochement with his

Catholic or even Augustinian past. But it does suggest that the Augustinian critique of human pride, both personal and political, is in no way irrelevant to modern political realities, whether of the mid-20th century or at present.

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## Notes

1. It has been observed by several commentators that Camus' thought seems permeated by theological themes and issues. It is fairly well-known that his academic thesis was on Augustine's theoretical relation to Plotinus. The New York University historian Tony Judt has noted others who find in Camus a religious sensibility. François Mauriac described Camus as "having an *anima naturaliter religiosa*" and Czeslow Milosz, in his eulogy for Camus, "wonders whether all Camus's work, and not just his academic thesis on St. Augustine, wasn't marked by a suppressed theological bent." See Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 93-94. The Catholic political scientist, David Walsh also finds in Camus a crucial 20th century critic of a modern strand of discourse that comes to divinize humanity. See Walsh's *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990). For a theological reading of Camus, see David Sprintzen, *Camus: A Critical Examination* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

2. In a play of the same period entitled *Les Justes* (ET: *The Just Assassins*), Camus explores this view through the character of Stepan. It is the character Dora who articulates the fear that all the assassins have done is rooted in pride. See Camus, *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958) 296.

# THE RELEVANCE OF MONICA IN AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

by Vicente Medina

I read Augustine's *Confessions* about 22 years ago while I was preparing for my comprehensive examinations. His work positively impressed me. Yet I have no recollection that his mother, Monica, made a significant impression on me. Reading his book for a second time helped me realize the relevance of Monica in Augustine's *Confessions*. There are many plausible ways that one can read *The Confessions*. For some, the book is about Augustine's love for God; for others, it is simply autobiographical; and, for others, it is just about the mystery of Creation. I, however, suggest that this book can be plausibly read as describing the necessary role that Monica plays in contributing to his conversion.

It is the love of his mother, Monica, rather than the power of his father, Patrick, that was instrumental in Augustine's conversion. It is also from his mother that he learns the redeeming power of *caritas*. According to Augustine, a mother's love is the closest that one can get to true love, namely God's love. A mother's love embodies the principle of *caritas*: giving the best of herself without expecting anything in return. While he learns a great deal from others about the Scriptures, it is through his mother's love that he actually experiences a glimpse of true love. Most of his experiences about love in the world are about concupiscence: a fetishistic love for sex and possessions. Such fetishism leads into a love for self or *superbia*. Thus it is in Monica's love for him that Augustine learns how concupiscence and *superbia* can be transcended in this world.

Augustine extols Monica's virtues such as her charity, humility, generosity, and loyalty. In describing their relationship, he portrays Monica as a prototype of a virtuous person. It is through her love that he chooses to become a Christian, and through her behavior that he learns the value of Christian virtues. Monica's personality is so powerful that she succeeds in converting Augustine and his father to Christianity. Although he shows respect for his father, the paternal role is virtually negligible in his *Confessions*. Augustine is unimpressed with paternal power. For him, power per se is unilluminating. It is moral authority that he admires, and that he finds in his mother. Monica's moral authority is able to change people's lives. She represents an embodiment of Christian virtues that induces Augustine to embrace Christianity. His message is clear: Christian beliefs are not just about theological and philosophical disputations, but above all about the practice of *caritas*. And he learns that from his mother.

Even during the last days of her life, Monica shows great humility and strength of character. Her conversation with Augustine regarding the afterlife is paradigmatic of her humility facing the mystery of God. Despite being an uneducated person and Augustine being an erudite one, at the moment of her death, they are simply overwhelmed by the mystery of God's Creation. Her equanimity expecting the inevitable is remarkable: It is based on her faith and her success in bringing about Augustine's conversion.

Augustine operates with a subtle dialectical method. He constantly evokes his love for God while trying unsuccessfully to grasp the mystery of God's nature. On several occasions he tries to understand the ineffable nature of God, but he is incapable of achieving this goal, since, for Augustine, God is that which is beyond total comprehension. Consider, for example, his disquisitions about evil, memory, and time. When he tries to explicate the notion of evil, he ends up with a paradox: If God is supremely good, and he is our Creator, then how can there be evil in the world? He attempts to transcend this paradox by affirming his belief in God. Similarly, when he introspects about the nature of memory, he comes across a paradox: The chamber of memory is so vast that one can recollect many things at will regardless of their physical presence. But forgetfulness is the absence of memory. Thus, how can one recollect forgetfulness? Likewise, when he explores the nature of time, he comes across another paradox: Time exists, but when he tries to explain it, it escapes him. Time is divided into past, present,

and future: The past is gone, the future is not here yet, and the present is just the bridge between the past and the future. But what is it? He cannot say. By reflecting or “deconstructing” the above-mentioned concepts, Augustine pushes reason to its limits. His faith seems not to depend so much on reason, but rather on its limitations. Once he reaches the limits of reason, he faces a dilemma: to embrace the banality of creation or to give himself away to God. He chooses the latter. And yet it is not his reason which leads him in that direction, but the transformative power of Monica’s love.

It can be plausibly argued that there are three moments in Augustine’s dialectics. First, he explores the limits of human reason. Second, while he is dazzled by the mystery of God, he is unprepared to overcome *superbia*. And third, he experiences the transformative power of Monica’s love to finally surrender himself to God. The will is necessary but insufficient to help him choose the path to conversion. He needs to experience Monica’s love to achieve his goal.

Some may wonder what follows from my suggested reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*. Here are some thoughts about the relevance of Augustine’s views for social and political philosophy. If indeed Monica plays such a crucial role in his life, it seems that maternal love rather than paternal power contributes to his conversion and hence to the development of his Christian worldview. In his Christian worldview, the notion of *caritas* rather than the notion of justice is the supreme value. If that is the case, then, for him, Christian beliefs are not so much about justice, but about mercy since real or divine justice is not of this world, but other-worldly.



# LEARNING TO LOVING LATE

by James P. McCartin

Around the age of 6, I became an inveterate snoop. My favored pastime became quietly absorbing private conversations, discreetly gathering shreds of evidence from my parents, siblings, and other relations. Yet of particular importance were my secret forays into the attic. There, under dim lights, I repeatedly pored over clues to decades of family history. I fixed my attention upon cardboard boxes of frayed letters and photographs of long-dead women and men, lockets of hair and baby shoes, term papers and penmanship awards, bank receipts, property deeds, architectural plans for our family home. Mixed generously among these treasured sources were signs of religious devotion: tarnished medals and broken strings of Rosary beads; images of the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary; well-worn devotional manuals and prayer cards; newspaper clippings recounting Solemn Requiem Masses offered for my forebears. There, in my parents' attic, I became a historian, and there, I began to sense that, in the history I pieced together, the signs of grace were persistent.

Sifting through those boxes, I discovered my family's complex past, and I gained some capacity to see life in its fullness. In a sense, the entire world revealed itself to me through a disorganized assortment of clues from dozens of lives: there, in that attic, I saw the unavoidable confluence of triumph and defeat — experienced by real people — that marks human history from age to age. I came to understand that life was not easy, that people who never talked about it knew the meaning of difficulty, even tragedy. I found rifts between friends and relatives, financial concerns, surgeries, miscarriages, unexpected deaths, even a man's desertion of his wife and infant daughter. And there I adopted a practice that would serve me well through life thus far: discerning the presence of grace through it all.

There is a certain subtlety to what I'm talking about here, a subtlety that refuses the temptations of romanticizing the past or blithely accepting whatever comes our way in the present. I do not ultimately see things from a perspective that celebrates the human capacity to endure extraordinary trials; nor do I affirm the bumper-sticker mentality that "It's All Good." Far from these things, in fact.

Instead, the lesson I began to learn as a young snoop — a lesson I continue to practice today — was this: in examining our past, whether as individuals or family members or citizens of a nation, we converse with ghosts and engage memories that elicit our generosity and understanding in new ways. Barring instances of trauma, the past is rarely fraught with the emotional intensity of the present. In memory, then, we can embrace people — including past manifestations of ourselves — with their many imperfections, and we do so in a fashion often impossible in the present, with its characteristic impatience and frustrations. In memory, we can attain new understanding and a fresh capacity to empathize and to love. This, I contend, is memory's greatest capacity.

Ultimately, Augustine's *Confessions* is a meditation on memory's greatest capacity. Having recounted his history from infancy through to his middle 30s, he sees with new perspective: exploring his memory allows Augustine to discern what once had been unrecognizable to him. Ultimately, reviewing the intricacies of his own history — the trials and the joys — affords new comprehension, a fresh angle from which he can view himself and others, including God. Moreover, as he examines his history, Augustine's capacity for love expands; in reacquainting himself with the characters of the past, he hones his ability to embrace them with their foibles and flaws. Above all, *The Confessions* demonstrates that, in examining the past, the pervasive confusion tied to experiencing events in the present can subside. Consequently, remembering enables new details to emerge and claims new grounds for understanding. Memory challenges Augustine to see with new eyes. Thus, perception is transformed within

this context of renewed consideration, and remembering becomes an invitation to empathy and love, a redemptive act.

Put differently: Augustine suggests that grace is fully recognized and experienced only through the act of remembering. Recounting his own story leads to the affirmation that God does not intervene in history in any confined sense, with mighty, wondrous deeds. Instead, God participates through a constant flow of subtle interventions that, though initially unperceived, add up to an invitation to conversion — an invitation to deeper love. Certainly, he demonstrates the considerable will and discipline needed to see and know such grace, but the invitation to love is nevertheless there awaiting acceptance. Remembering allows us to receive the invitation, he argues, and prepares us to respond accordingly. Thus, he can address God in a mode of recognition and gratitude: “Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you” (Book 10:27.38). Memory has become the means to love.

The implication for Augustine’s reader is clear: It can be possible for you, too, to perceive what you have overlooked. You can undertake the redemptive act of remembering; you can practice the capacity of seeing anew and loving late.

I now realize that this was the very lesson to which I was introduced as a curious child exploring my family’s history. Considering the tragedies and anxieties, the joys and triumphs — reviewing them in my young mind — I was practicing the capacity to see in the past the infinite complexity of human experience, gaining in the process the grounds for empathy. I now recognize that, however limited my young understanding, those early forays into the attic introduced me to the practice of seeing in the past the persistence of grace, the invitation to love. Given the remove of elapsed time, even of elapsed generations, I was practicing the ability to see with new eyes. I was learning to love through the faculty of memory.

I still practice this lesson today mostly because it remains necessary for me to do so. Far from being a virtuoso in the art of perceiving and responding to grace, I have real shortcomings in this regard. Like most people, my senses become dulled by mundane concerns, however justified they may be. I lose the capacity to recognize invitations to love that swirl around me each day. So, remembering the past serves as my means of retrieving bypassed grace. And I rejoice that I, too, can love late.

# TALKING ABOUT GOD: THE CONFESSIONS AND THE RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES

by Albert B. Hakim

Saint Augustine had an aching desire to know the truth of God and man. Of God and his soul. Of God and himself. Although coming to know one's self is a never-ending journey, it has its beginning by an immersion into life, as Augustine poignantly describes in his *Confessions*, and then unfolds in a day-by-day experience of existence. But coming to know God, though never detached from experience, is not a matter of experience but of understanding and faith. Therein lies the problem for Augustine, the theologian, who craves to put into words what he believes, to say something about Him in human terms, and to make the mysteries of God intelligible to the searching mind. All theologians face the same problem which, centuries after Augustine's time, was couched by Saint Anselm in what became the logo of medieval theology, *faith seeking understanding*.

How is it *possible* to say anything about God, for the moment you say it, you are caught up in the dilemma of comprehending what is incomprehensible, of categories fitted to finite reality being made to fit the infinite? If we hold it to be *impossible* to say anything at all about God, then reason and revelation inhabit planes that never touch each other, rendering futile any dialogue between them. If we hold it *possible* to say anything about God, then it has to be in human terms, and to be such that our human way of speaking does not compromise the divine way of being. Acutely aware of this dilemma, theologians have devised various approaches to resolving it, as in negative theology, which tries to say what God is by saying what He is not, or in some form of analogy, metaphor, or symbol. But there is a complementary mode of approach, referred to as the *reconciliation of opposites*, or the *coincidence of opposites*, which, I think, is a primary insight into the theology of *The Confessions*.

The *reconciliation of opposites* has been a constituent of Western thought since the time of the pre-Socratics, when it was presented in the problem of *the one and the many*. The *cosmos* is a cause for wonder, they thought, because it is a unity of a vast number of individuals, prompting both Thales and Pythagoras to ensure the wondrous balance of the cosmos by refusing to emphasize the one (reality as a whole) at the expense of the many (reality as individuals). Both thinkers understood that where there is unity among many there has to be an underlying reason for it. Thales chose a physical approach in postulating the element of water as unifying substrate. Pythagoras, chose a mathematical model inasmuch as, arithmetically, all numbers maintain individuality even as they are brought together as a whole in the number "1" from which they are all generated. This also appears to be the basis for the mystical element in Pythagorean thought, that *all things are one-in-the-One*.

Heraclitus, because of the ubiquity of change, maintained that reality is always on-the-move, like a flowing river, but even in multitudinous change there is a unity brought about by the presiding force of the cosmos, the Logos. So Heraclitus, who never spoke much anyway, urged his hearers not to listen to him, but to the Logos, to realize that "all things are one," and that "whatever differs with itself is in agreement." And in one of his well-known fragments, he teases our minds by laying out the unity of opposites found in epigrams like "God is day-night, winter-summer, war-peace, satiety-hunger, all the opposites."

In Christian tradition, there is no thinker more articulate on the notion of the unity of opposites than the 15th century Nicholas of Cusa. As a busy bishop traveling from one diocese to another, he successfully harmonized the active and the contemplative life, a kind of mystic on horseback. In his book, with the thought-provoking title *On Learned Ignorance*, he tackles the question of "how can we talk about God?" Human reasoning, in dealing with categories, oppositions and contradictions, takes us just so far; sooner or later it reaches a level, *a terra incognita*, in which it is a stranger because the rational task proper to it no longer prevails. In Cusanus' terms, human understanding must acknowledge its ignorance, "learned ignorance" therefore. At this impasse, Cusanus points to

an unexpected horizon as to how we can talk about God in realizing afresh that “opposition” and “contradiction” are tools of human intelligence and applicable only to the domain which human intelligence is destined to work in, not the divine, so that opposition and contradiction, meaningful in the human domain, are dissolved in the divine, or meld into the divine unity. Put another way, the degrees of perfection, from the highest to the lowest, from the infinite to the infinitesimal, from the maximum to the minimum, are undifferentiated in Him, which even their definitions attest to, for the maximum and the minimum, the most and the least, share the same definition: “that which cannot be less than it is.”

The reconciliation of opposites as a way of speaking of God suffuses Augustine’s thought. It’s a way for him to speak in awe of the utter transcendence of God and at the same time His utter immanence in the human heart. It’s a way for him to say that, as Creator of all, God is distinct from His creation, yet one with everything He has created; that He is ineffable, yet exquisitely declared by the least significant; that He cannot be contained, yet is contained in all things; that He is beyond man’s hope, yet condescends to make hope real; that He is beyond ‘possession’, yet wills to be ‘possessed’ in love. Though this audacious bipolar style of thinking of God characterizes Augustine’s writings, it has special significance for *The Confessions* because it is a testimony to his own personal relationship with God. At the same time, it is an over-arching testimony to all that every human being has a similar relationship with Him, and that the truth for anyone is the truth for everyone, the inexpressible truth reconciling the human and the divine: humanity-in-divinity and divinity-in-humanity.

Without trying to parse every sentence of *The Confessions*, just consider the opening paragraphs of the first book; they are the sparks enkindling the entire work. After the beginning prayer, Augustine is startled to think that he can possibly call on God without temerity, for “in calling out to Him, I am calling Him to me! ... Heaven and earth cannot contain Him, and yet here I am asking Him to be with me, ... He is not only *with me* but *in me*. If He were not in me, I would cease to be: “Thus, O God, I should be nothing, utterly nothing, unless You were in me, or, rather, unless I were in You.”

Paragraph 4 is as passionate a display of the reconciliation of opposites you are likely to find: “O You, the greatest and the best ... utterly hidden and utterly present ... abiding yet mysterious, suffering no change yet changing all things: never new, never old ... ever in action, ever at rest, gathering all things to Yourself yet needing nothing.” He ends the paragraph showing himself, with a bit of pious humor, to be the subject of opposites: “those who say most are but dumb.”

As to the sublimest mystery of all, the mystery of God’s love, Augustine exclaims: “In pouring Yourself out upon us, You do not come down to us but rather elevate us to You,” and “What am I to You, that You should ask for my love and if I do not return it You would become angry with me and threaten with great woes? Surely not to love You is already a great woe.” Cradled in the idea of condescension and ascension is another mystical epigraph of Heraclitus, that “the way up and the way down are one and the same.” Surely T.S. Eliot thought so in *Burnt Norton*. For Augustine the passage between God and man is the awesome truth of divine love as he met it in John’s terse statement of all theology: “God is love.” God condescends, comes down to man, not for any display of power, grandeur, dominion, or any other divine attribute, save for the sole purpose of raising man to the fulfillment of a person-to-Person union of love.

# AUGUSTINE'S INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

by Richard M. Liddy

John Cavadini's seminar on Augustine's *Confessions* provided me with a number of new and valuable insights on a work I have known for many years and taught for the last few. My students have responded to this great text because they sense beneath its often-strange surface a life like their own: a life of tumultuous growth from infancy through childhood to adolescence and adulthood. A life of seeking fun and avoiding restraints, of friendships and sexuality; and at the same time a life of coming to terms with parents and jobs and traditions and, above all, with an inner desire for truth and peace: "our hearts are restless."

In my teaching of *The Confessions* these last few years, I have emphasized my own area of expertise, that is, philosophical development — what Bernard Lonergan calls "intellectual conversion." As I will indicate below, Lonergan himself often commented on Augustine's intellectual conversion, especially as recounted in Book 7 of *The Confessions*, where he tells of the powerful impact on him of reading "some books of the Platonists." Cavadini's seminar set such considerations within the broader context of Augustine's religious conversion to Christ and the Christian community — symbolized in Augustine's humble conversation with his mother, Monica, in Book 9. A sort of philosophical mysticism gave way to a humble ecclesial mysticism.

But let me in this article just highlight that important step on Augustine's journey when in the spring of 386 he read the books of the Platonists. For that experience resulted in a great "change of mind" that prepared the way for his later religious conversion. But what is an intellectual conversion? If we are going to use this as a heuristic for understanding a great theme in *The Confessions*, we need to have some idea of what we are talking about. In the first section of this paper, we will present an example from learning a science and some account of the nature of this event; in the second section we will show this change of mind exemplified in *The Confessions*.

## 1. Intellectual conversion

The physicist Freeman Dyson once described the process involved in his students' learning quantum mechanics. It involves three stages.

The student begins by learning the tricks of the trade. He learns how to make calculations in quantum mechanics and get the right answers. . . . To learn the mathematics of the subject and to learn how to use it takes about six months. This is the first stage in learning quantum mechanics, and it is comparatively easy and painless. The second stage comes when the student begins to worry because he does not understand what he has been doing. He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head. He gets confused in trying to arrive at a physical explanation for each of the mathematical tricks he has been taught. He works very hard and gets discouraged because he does not seem able to think clearly. This second stage often lasts six months or longer, and it is strenuous and unpleasant. Then, quite unexpectedly, the third stage begins. The student suddenly says to himself, "I understand quantum mechanics," or rather he says, "I understand now that there really isn't anything to be understood" (Dyson 259-260).

In other words, the student comes to understand that there really isn't anything to be understood in the "clear physical pictures" she had been seeking. Certainly the student has been learning something — quantum mechanics — but at the same time she comes to understand that that learning involves "unlearning something," that is, one's spontaneous anticipations about reality. And that can be a painful process.

In a more contemporary language, one ceases to consider knowing to be merely experiencing or having representative images and one comes to realize that genuine knowledge adds to experiencing accurate understanding and true judgment. Realizing this — coming to understand one's own understanding — is what Lonergan calls "intellectual conversion." For Dyson's students it would mean explicitly realizing what their breakthroughs to quantum mechanics meant about themselves. It would mean having a breakthrough, not now about the physical universe, but about the character of their own minds' capability to understand the physical universe.

For Lonergan, such a breakthrough to the character of our own minds is truly startling and strange — for it radically challenges our common sense knowledge of ourselves. For, as he puts it,

... some form of naive realism seems to appear utterly unquestionable to very many. As soon as they begin to speak of knowing, of objectivity, of reality, there crops up the assumption that all knowing must be something like looking. To be liberated from that blunder, to discover the self-transcendence proper to the human process of coming to know, is to break often long-ingrained habits of thought and speech. It is to acquire the mastery in one's own house that is to be had only when one knows precisely what one is doing when one is knowing. It is a conversion, a new beginning, a fresh start. It opens the way to ever further clarifications and developments.

## 2. Augustine's intellectual conversion

Now what does this have to do with Augustine's Confessions? Well, in *The Confessions* it is clear that Augustine does have a clear memory of such a startling breakthrough. Chiefly recounted in Book 7, its echo can be heard throughout *The Confessions*. According to his great biographer Peter Brown, Augustine could not have told us such an interesting story about his life if he had not had at hand a language that helped him understand his own story and to tell it so well. A significant contribution to that language, as he tells us in Book 7, came from some "books of the Platonists" lent to him by an acquaintance in the spring of 386. As Brown puts it:

For the Neo-Platonists provided [Augustine] with the one essential tool for any serious autobiography; they had given him a theory of the dynamics of the soul that made sense of his experience (95).

One element in those "dynamics of the soul" was Augustine's radical desire to understand. At the age of 19, buffeted by the winds of desire, Augustine happened upon Cicero's *Hortensius*, a book since lost to history. Through that book, he discovered in himself a new dimension of desire, the desire to understand.

Quite definitely it changed the direction of my mind. ... Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after inward wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You. ... The one thing that delighted me in Cicero's exhortation was that I should love, and seek, and win, and hold, and embrace, not this or that philosophical school but Wisdom itself, whatever it might be (*Confessions* 3:4).

What the *Hortensius* represented for Augustine was a disinterested search for the truth, a desire that remained in him through the years and kept him moving from one school of philosophy to another: from Manichaeism to Academic skepticism and beyond. Having eventually become disillusioned with the fantastic myths of the Manichees and the quite evident lack of erudition of the sect's chief exponent, Faustus, Augustine was of a more or less skeptical frame of mind when in the spring of 386 he happened upon "some books of the Platonists" (*quidam libri platonici*) — probably the books of Plotinus and some by his student Porphyry. These books were "packed with thought" (*libri quidem pleni*), and they produced in him a "conflagration" (*Contra Academicos* 2:2.5).

And what did Augustine find in these books that they had such a massive effect on him? First of all, they explicitly "turned him inward" toward his own conscious self. "Being admonished by all this to return to myself, I entered into my own depths ... " (*Confessions* 7:10). Secondly, under the influence of this reading he began to think

of “spirit” in its own terms. And thirdly, he came to realize that the chief intellectual obstacle in coming to know his own spirit and spirit in general was his need to imaginatively “picture” things which cannot strictly speaking be pictured — whether his own mind, his own being, reality, evil or God.

For example, right from the first pages of *The Confessions*, Augustine reflects on the nature of the divine and how it transcends any images he could construct. How could he call on God, for example, he asks, to “come into him,” if it is indeed true that God is everywhere and in all? Eventually he recounts his discovery that all his understandings of the divine had been clouded by his imagination.

Though I did not even then think of You under the shape of a human body, yet I could not but think of You as some corporeal substance, occupying all space, whether infused in the world, or else diffused through infinite space beyond the world ... (7:1).

When I desired to think of my God, I could not think of him save as a bodily magnitude — for it seemed to me that what was not such was nothing at all: this indeed was the principal and practically the sole cause of my inevitable error (5:10).

In other words, what Augustine thought was God he came to discover was not God. Augustine even thought of evil as a type of bodily substance. For a long time he had been troubled by the nature of evil and the Manicheans had influenced him to think of evil as some kind of “bodily substance,” another principle opposed to the good God.

I did not know that evil has no being of its own but is only an absence of good, so that it simply is not. How indeed should I see this, when the sight of my eyes saw no deeper than bodies and the sight of my soul no deeper than the images of bodies? ... (3:7)

In my ignorance I thought of evil not simply as some kind of substance, but actually as a bodily substance, because I had not learned to think of mind save as a more subtle body, extended in space (5:10).

The philosophical issue, as he slowly began to realize, was the character of his own mind.

My mind was in search of such images as the forms of my eye was accustomed to see; and I did not realize that the mental act by which I formed these images, was not itself a bodily image (7:1).

Slowly Augustine began to believe not only in the unseen, but also in the totally different character of such reality, reality mediated to us by language and words.

I began to consider the countless things I believed which I had not seen, or which had happened with me not there — so many things in the history of nations, so many facts about places and cities, which I had never seen, so many things told me by friends, by doctors, by this man, by that man; and unless we accepted these things, we should do nothing at all in this life. Most strongly of all it struck me how firmly and unshakeably I believed that I was born of a particular father and mother, which I could not possibly know unless I believed it on the word of others (6:5).

Lonergan would speak of this as Augustine’s discovery of the world mediated by meaning, that is, the world that we know by acts of understanding, judging and believing. Such a world goes far beyond the world of immediacy: of sights and sounds, touches and smells, tastes and feelings. It is a world in which Augustine had lived since he had learned how to speak, but it was a world he was, finally at the age of 31, just coming to recognize for what it was. This world mediated by meaning is a fragile world, for besides fact there is fiction,

besides truth there is error, besides honesty there is deceit. Consequently, there was his growing ability to think in terms of *veritas*, or true reality rooted in God.

I was now studying the ground of my admiration for the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or of earth, and on what authority I might judge of things mutable and say: "This ought to be so, that not so." Enquiring then what was the source of my judgment, when I did so judge I had discovered the immutable and true eternity of truth (*veritas*) above my changing mind. Thus by stages I passed from bodies to the soul which uses the body for its perceiving, and from this to the soul's inner power, to which the body's senses present external things, as indeed the beasts are able; and from there I passed on to the reasoning power, to which is referred for judgment what is received from the body's senses. This too realized that it was mutable in me, and rose to its own understanding. It withdrew my thought from its habitual way, abstracting from the confused crowds of phantasm that it might find what light suffused it, when with utter certainty it cried aloud that the immutable was to be preferred to the mutable, and how it had come to know the mutable itself; for if it had not come to some knowledge of the immutable, it could not have known it as certainly preferable to the mutable. Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is ... (7:17).

Centuries later Lonergan will write of the similarity of this transition in Augustine's life to the transition that is implied in doing modern science — the transition to which Dyson's students were exposed.

St. Augustine of Hippo narrates that it took him years to make the discovery that the name, real, might have a different connotation from the name, body. Or, to bring the point nearer home, one might say that it has taken modern science four centuries to make the discovery that the objects of its inquiry need not be imaginable entities moving through imaginable processes in an imaginable space-time. The fact that a Plato attempted to communicate through his dialogues, the fact that an Augustine eventually learnt from the writers whom, rather generally, he refers to as Platonists, has lost its antique flavor and its apparent irrelevance to the modern mind. Even before Einstein and Heisenberg it was clear enough that the world described by scientists was strangely different from the world depicted by artists and inhabited by men of common sense. But it was left to twentieth-century physicists to envisage the possibility that the objects of their science were to be reached only by severing the umbilical cord that tied them to the maternal imagination of man (1992, 15).

Elsewhere Lonergan will write:

Similarly, St. Augustine, who was a man of extraordinary intelligence, was for years a materialist. He knew he was a materialist, and he said so. But he changed. And then when he wanted to talk about the real, what is really so, what word did he use? *Veritas*. Augustine does not talk about *realitas*, but about *veritas*, about what is true. And the truth is known not without, *non foras*, and not just within, *non intus*, but above us, in a light that he describes as incommutable and eternal. The history of Augustine's thought is the history of the limitations of the infantile apprehension of reality and the history of the shift to the true (1993, 170).



Cf. also "Method in Catholic Theology" (1992, 10):

Without such self-appropriation and the critical appraisal it generates, one may repeat all that an Augustine says of veritas, or all that an Aquinas says of being, but in doing so, I believe, one will not be raising oneself up to their level but cutting them down to one's own size."

If Dyson's students had spent as much time thinking about themselves and their own spirits as they did about quantum mechanics, they might have had as startling and strange experience as Augustine did in the spring and summer of the year 386.

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# THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION: A MODEL OF EDUCATION BASED ON SAINT AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

by A. D. Amar

My interest in the seminar titled "Augustine [of Hippo, not Canterbury] on Reading Culture" by John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame, organized by the Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall, was the result of two motives. The first of these is guided by my serving on the Signature Courses Design Subcommittee of Seton Hall University's Core Curriculum Committee. In meetings, I noticed a frequent mention of Saint Augustine in reference to designing our Core Curriculum according to the Catholic intellectual tradition. However, due to my lack of knowledge of Augustine's contributions to education, I could not contribute fully to the discussions. As soon as I saw the announcement of this seminar, I considered it my opportunity to expand my understanding of Augustine and his influence on Catholic culture. The second reason that I volunteered was directed by my experience with previous seminars organized by the Center for Catholic Studies. In 2003, I attended its seminar called "Managing as if Faith Matters!" and found it very interesting and useful in my classroom.

Outright, I must say that this seminar met my expectations: I can use it in the design of the University Core Curriculum and bring information gained from this to my classes, particularly the one I teach to our MBA students on managing knowledge workers. In fact, I walked away from this seminar with a lot more than what I had bargained for. Professor Cavadini's assigned readings from *The Confessions*, treatment of the difficult subject matter, delivery of concepts, and answers to questions made the experience worthwhile. Although I had searched for the answer as to what constitutes the Catholic intellectual tradition and had received some constructs by posing the question to several learned scholars, my answer was firmed up by reading *The Confessions* during this seminar.

Augustine gives the overall objective of education in *The Confessions*. Understandably, as the Catholic Bishop of Hippo, he condemns wealth as destitution of spirit and glory as something shameful; he does mention that from his education "[t]he objective they [parents, teachers, etc.] had in view was merely to satisfy the appetite for wealth and glory" (Book 1:12.19). However, Augustine's overt mention of wealth and glory as the objective of learning in his time gives us cause to consider it as a valid reason for our students to get a college education. Nevertheless, it should not be the sole objective guiding our core curriculum.

I will summarize the Catholic intellectual tradition in the following paragraphs:

According to the understanding I have developed of Augustine, education in the Catholic intellectual tradition begins with the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Book 1:13.20). It should include Greek and Roman literature (for example, Homer) and Greek philosophy, (such as Plato). He particularly mentions Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Teaching writing and speech can also be studied from Augustine. In Book 1:17:27 of *The Confessions*, Augustine writes that he was required "to recite the speech of Juno [from The Aeneid 1: 38] in her anger and grief that she 'could not keep the Trojan king out of Italy.'" He also writes about the study of poetic fiction and the expression in plain prose of the sense that the writer had put in his verse. Education also should include learning a foreign language (Book 1:14.23). Augustine writes that, later in his life, he understood why he was forced to read literature and learn arithmetic tables. However, he states: "No one is doing right if he is acting against his will, even when what he is doing is good" (Book 1:12.19).

Augustine's model lays appropriate emphasis on moral conscience. He states that "the knowledge of letters is not as deep-seated in the conscience as the imprint of the moral conscience" (Book 1:18.29). Among others, he draws on a moral edict from Plato (*Gorgias* 469), according to which it is better to suffer than to do wrong. What Augustine preaches is primarily guided by Matthew 7:12: One should not do to another what he would not wish

done to himself. An individual whose moral conscience is developed by the Catholic intellectual tradition should be afraid of committing barbarism or deception as did Augustine (Book 1:19.30). In spite of engaging in behavior that he condemned in others, he rejects this, and, thus, promotes a behavior free of hypocrisy.

There is also a place for physical activity. Augustine admits being disobedient to his guardians when they wanted him to put his time and effort into learning. Instead, he engaged in athletics for the “love of sport” (Book 1:10.16). By including behavior he condemns, Augustine leaves room for sports in contemporary Catholic education.

There is now no doubt in my mind that there is a well-described Catholic intellectual tradition in education; however, I am not fully convinced of the validity of this fourth-century model in 21st century education, especially to the design of a college curriculum. In several separate narrations, Augustine himself did not like this model.

In the time of Augustine’s Confessions, there was little development of scientific knowledge. Some primitive knowledge of astronomy that enabled mankind to predict eclipses had developed; but science had not matured to a point of becoming part of structured education. The progress of individuals and nations in our time very much depends on the knowledge of science and technology. If we literally follow Augustine, we will leave our people far behind in this highly competitive global economy of the 21st century.

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# AUGUSTINE'S CRITIQUE OF CULTURE?

by Colleen Conway

I was attracted to this seminar by the idea of Augustine as a critic of culture. My own work during the past few years has been studying the Roman culture out of which early Christianity grew. I have been especially interested in the rhetoric of masculinity — how the elites in the culture defined what it took to be a man and how high the stakes were for maintaining this masculinity. One can find this rhetoric woven throughout philosophical, medical, legal and literary texts of the Greco-Roman period.

Moreover, the educational process was all about forming “manly men.” One can see this from the most basic level of education (copying well-known maxims) to the highest level (training in rhetoric). The maxims that taught the boys how to read and write promoted certain masculine values and warned against the ways of women. To be a rhetorician, one needed to learn how to move one’s body and modulate one’s voice to avoid accusations of softness and effeminacy. One’s speech revealed one’s character, and as Quintilian, the first-century teacher of rhetoric suggests, only a *vir bonus*, a “good man,” can be a successful rhetorician.

Because much of Augustine’s *Confessions* has to do with his educational process, I was intrigued with a reading that sees him engaged in a critique of culture, specifically a critique of the drive for status and prestige. As an educated, and therefore elite, man it would be a rare thing indeed if Augustine was able to step outside this system to critique it. To a certain extent, there are places where such a critique is evident. Among the most powerful aspects of the text is Augustine’s penetrating analysis of his drive to do evil. That the analysis focuses on the seemingly trivial boyhood swiping of some neighbor’s pears makes the discussion all the more compelling.

In other ways, however, Augustine is firmly rooted in and determined by his culture. He is, after all, presenting his readers with an erudite, rhetorical masterpiece. And he is, after all, an affluent and educated man. Most significantly, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that for Augustine, conversion to Christianity is closely connected to his mastery over his body. This notion of self-mastery is not specific to Christianity; indeed, it was a key indicator of ideal masculinity in the Greco-Roman culture. For the elite male in the Greco-Roman world, succumbing to desire was to act the part of a woman.

This was true no matter what form such desire might take. Accusations of adultery, for example, often went hand-in-hand with accusations of effeminacy. Even if one showed undue affection toward one’s wife, one could be seen as “soft” and womanly. Why? Because, as everyone “knew,” women are irrational, weak, and far less likely to be able to control their own bodies. On the other hand, true manliness meant complete control over one’s body. Thus, if Augustine seeks self-control and mastery of the body, he is in good company with many other elite Roman males for whom just such control was a prerequisite for ruling over others. So, while Augustine helpfully identifies the problem of self-distortion that gets in the way of a life of gratitude for our being, he does not escape the gender constructions of his culture that would have him strive for a type of masculinity commensurate with the ruling elite.

And there is more. To what extent is Augustine’s central insight regarding the drive for prestige gendered as well? On the one hand, I am sure that for many people the drive for prestige and recognition may interfere with developing a life of praise and gratitude toward God. Indeed, Augustine’s insight offers a sound critique for certain members of the elite class in Rome, and certain members of the elite class in the 21st century world. But does it ring true for all people? While I hesitate to generalize, my instincts tell me that for many others, the fundamental problem of human existence is not what Augustine describes.

For example, I once had a professor of church history who spoke of her own sense of personal sin as something quite different than self-pride or a drive for prestige. Her struggle was quite the opposite. For her “sin” was a debilitating devaluing of her own self which left her incapable of contributing to the broader communal good. This was true for her, and for many women she knew. Rather than a blinding desire for recognition that leaves one unable to express gratitude for one’s being, this type of sin is a blinded sense of self-worth. What my professor needed most of all was to love and value herself. This would put her on the path toward a life of gratitude and praise.

In offering these reflections, I am not suggesting that Augustine should have or could have taken stock of such issues. I am suggesting that if we work with Augustine in our core curriculum, these issues should be part of the discussion. And rather than telling our students what Augustine is up to, I would hope that we get them to read the text deeply themselves. We might facilitate these close readings with questions such as: Who is the self in Augustine? How does he construct this “self” for the reader? How do I relate to this construction of the self? Who is God in Augustine? In what ways does this God match my own experience? What does it mean to be a man or woman in this text? What are the ways that *The Confessions* ring true? What about Augustine’s world seems foreign? Such questions (and others!) would help the students to explore Augustine in depth and open ways to examine personal links between their lives and the life of Augustine. This would be a worthwhile goal for reading *The Confessions* in the context of a core course at Seton Hall.

# AUGUSTINE IN A BOX: CONFESSIONS OF AN AGNOSTIC

by Nathaniel Knight

I am thinking of a cathedral, a structure of magnificent scale and grandeur. The massive walls, flying buttresses, shimmering stained glass and majestic arches rise up in my imagination out of the pages of Saint Augustine's Confessions. With its intricate detail, stylistic precision and structural harmony, the work appeals to the mind and the senses while a powerful emotional magnetism entices the reader to cast away pride and enter into the edifice.

How does one read a book like *The Confessions*? As historians we seek to understand Augustine and his times, the conditions that shaped his work and its impact on subsequent generations. As literary scholars we probe the craft of Augustine's creation, the poetry of his language, his nuances of expression. As philosophers and theologians, we ponder the structure of his thought — its sources, contexts and underlying assumptions. But in whatever guise we choose to approach the work, we cannot avoid the challenge it poses to our own worldview and to our times. We read Augustine through the filter of our modern-day sensibilities and experience, but the ability of his work to unsettle, to pry beneath the veneer of our impartiality, suggests that, post-modernism aside, he continues, at least in part, to set the terms of our encounter.

Augustine's vision, as I read it, starts with a basic insight into the human condition. To be human is to be incomplete. We are imperfect beings — needy, hungry, driven by an inexorable striving to find that missing piece. Just let me land that job, buy that house, marry that woman, vanquish that rival and somehow my life will be everything it should be. But of course, it won't. No one really lives happily ever after. It is the striving itself that defines our existence rather than the moment of fulfillment.

How do we know God? Perhaps our awareness arises out of our very imperfection. Constantly sensing our own incompleteness, we envision a being that is everything we are not — whole where we are partial, infinite where we are finite, timeless where we are all too mortal. In a world in which everything passes, all glory fades, every Rome must fall, we dream of a state of permanence. We deceive ourselves. Unable to deny our own personal mortality, we insist upon the immortality of our works — this will be the war that ends all wars, the Reich that lasts a thousand years; our children will live to see communism. Or we turn our minds to God — the Word for which there are no words: eternal, omnipresent, the creator of all things whose presence imparts sense and meaning to our existence.

How do you envision a God that is in all places and in all things? "Where do you put the overflow of you after heaven and earth are filled," Augustine asks. (p. 4). How do you experience a God that is outside of time? How do you give God a name without imposing upon the infiniteness of his being? For Augustine the key lies in the one piece of wisdom he was unable to find in the writings of the Neoplatonists: "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." In taking on human form, human reason, human suffering, Christ made the infinity of the divine accessible to human experience and in so doing offered a path to transcendence, an escape from sin.

Augustine wrestles with the question of sin. It is not, he discovers, a being, a substance, offsetting the divine, as the Manicheans would have it, in a grand cosmic balancing act. If God, the creator of all things, remains in all things, then nothing can be truly evil in its essence. Evil, then, becomes, for Augustine, a turning away from the divine within, "a perversity of will twisted away from the higher substance, you, O God, toward inferior things, rejecting its own inner life and swelling with external matter" (126). In turning toward Christ we turn away from sin and attain the hope of redemption.

But what does it mean to be saved? How can we be sure that the prospect of salvation is not simply another vain hope that we might yet overcome the imperfection of our nature? Augustine makes it clear that this is not the

case. He provides a powerful and moving account of the process of conversion, but after the moment of catharsis, life goes on. Conversion brings comfort, a sense of closeness to God, but the struggle continues unabated. If anything, Augustine's awareness of the gravity of sin intensifies as he sets a higher standard for himself. Pleasures which might not have evoked concern in an earlier phase now come under scrutiny. When does savoring the food we need for sustenance grow into gluttony? (204) When does the pleasure we feel at the sound of a hymn sung in worship cross the line into sinful sensuality? (208) And by the very virtue of resisting the temptations of the flesh, do we not risk falling into pride, the greatest of all the sins? We welcome the praise of those around us as if our triumphs derive from our own natures rather than the divine presence within us. Conversion, far from ending the struggle with sin, merely unveils its full dimensions. Even when turned toward Christ we still can not escape the constraints of our nature.

These are Augustine's thoughts, through the prism of my understanding, but what of my own? In many ways, I find his vision compelling, but my appreciation is to a large extent aesthetic: I delight in the vivid immediacy of his voice, the elegance of his syntax, his penetrating intellect, and the boldness of his inquiries. Looking at his work as a self-contained whole, I admire its harmony and structural integrity. Yet Augustine would no doubt find such an appreciation disappointing if not downright blasphemous. His work is a call to faith. His goal is to touch the heart and soul, not to sooth the senses and pique the intellect. And perhaps my aesthetic appreciation is indeed a way of holding his message at arm's length, enclosing it in a case to be picked up, examined, enjoyed and placed back on the shelf for another day. Augustine would probably see in my resistance to faith the same obstacles he faced in his own struggle — the gravity of worldly attachments pulling one down from the ascent to the divine. But doubts remain. Is his Neo-Platonic chain of being really the proper metaphor for understanding our place in the modern world, our relationship with nature, our role in the communities that define our lives? Are his strictures on the dangers of pride, the imperative of praise and the moral illegitimacy of goals pursued outside the framework of a relationship with God congruent with life in a tolerant, pluralistic and largely secular society? Can we follow his path without finding ourselves in an enclosed world of self-righteous certainties and moral absolutes? Does the essence of humility lie in subordinating oneself to an all-encompassing truth or in acknowledging the limits of our own cognition?

Augustine is beckoning from the cathedral door. He captivates the mind, enchants the heart, but, for now, my feet remain planted on the ground.

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# SAINT AUGUSTINE IN EASTERN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

by Ines Angjeli Murzaku

## Introduction

Orthodox theology is undergoing a patristic revival. Indeed, Orthodoxy needed a patristic reawakening, a genuine reminder of its authentic roots and a cleaning away of some superfluous Latinizations. However, there has been a negative side of this patristic revival. The “heresy hunt” trend among some Orthodox scholars and intellectuals in search of freeing Orthodoxy of Western influences has been hypercritical of the West and Western mentality. Among Westernizers being admonished for the contamination of authentic Orthodoxy is Saint Augustine, the venerable Bishop of Hippo. However, the heresy quest and the tearing to pieces of Augustine and his theology (Rose 84) is very un-Orthodox in spirit and emblematic of that sense of apprehensiveness and confinement that for well-known historical circumstances have kept Orthodoxy apart from the main developments in the West. Additionally, these actions are a betrayal of the ecumenical movement and the spirit of the united Church of the first millennium of Christianity.

The anti-Augustinians not only attack the whole Orthodox West of the early centuries, but also a great many current and former Orthodox thinkers who value Augustinian thinking. Augustine’s *Confessions* occupied and continues to occupy an eminent place among Orthodox spiritual books. What Orthodox thinkers find elucidating in Augustinian thought is his Orthodox feeling of devotion and love for Christ, which come out so strongly in his non-dogmatic works like *The Confessions*.

What adversaries are after is a new estrangement and the constitution of an “Orthodox” denomination that prides itself on the rightness of its rational views. If Augustine is really a “heretic,” then doesn’t the whole West go down the drain with him?

The heresy hunters can certainly find copious signs of Western mentality and influences in Pope Gregory I, or Gregory the Great, which can preclude him as a father and saint in the eyes of many of today’s Orthodox polemicists. Gregory the Great, known as Dialogist in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, is accepted in the East on the basis of his general repute in the West and on the basis of his famous *Dialogues on the Life of Saint Benedict*. Furthermore, the Eastern Orthodox Church has always credited Gregory with devising the Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts.

The purpose of this essay is to explain some of the reservations raised against Augustine on the part of Eastern Christians focusing on the title — “Blessed” or “Saint Augustine” — and Augustinian theology of sin in general and Original Sin in particular.

## Title: “Blessed Augustine” versus “Saint Augustine”?

The East, which does not accept all of Augustine’s teachings, usually refers to Augustine either as Blessed (*beatus*) or Divine (*divinus*). In Russia, as early as the eighteenth century, the custom of referring to Augustine as “Blessed Augustine” became well established and in Russian Orthodox practice Augustine is almost always referred to as Blessed (*blazhenny*) Augustine.

However, in the early centuries of the united church, the word “blessed” with reference to an individual of holy life was used more or less interchangeably with the word “saint” (*sanctus*) or “holy.” This obviously was not the result of any formal canonization but was an act of the reverent consciousness of the faithful. The process of an individual being declared a saint in the Catholic Church began in the late ninth century, when the church in Rome demanded that all the saints throughout her jurisdiction be added to an official list to be kept in Rome. Before that time, the name “saint” was applied more informally, and many early saints have never been formally canonized.



The vast majority of the saints (*aghioi*) in the Eastern Orthodox calendar were acknowledged by the people and the clergy of the church, as a result of shared knowledge, conviction, experience, and reputation of a particular Christian's life that had been exemplary. It was the Church of the People of God, i.e. the living experience of the Orthodox believers, who worshipped and prayed through the centuries in their local communities that made these individuals *aghioi*.

So, equally in both the East and West, the title *sanctus* was based chiefly on popular veneration. Thus Saint Martin of Tours, a fourth-century wonderworker, is referred to by early writers such as Saint Gregory of Tours sometimes as blessed and sometimes as saint. Furthermore, Augustine is referred to in the fifth century by Saint Faustus of Lerins as the most blessed (*beatissimus*); in the sixth century by Saint Gregory the Great as both blessed and saint; and in the ninth century by Saint Photius as holy. These different titles all mean the same thing: Augustine was recognized as belonging to the ranks of those outstanding for their sanctity and teaching, and his thinking and theological investigation was highly acclaimed.

In the West, the feast day of Saint Augustine is observed on August 28, the day of his death. The name of Saint Augustine appears in the book of Eastern saints and also in the calendar — June 15, New Calendar, and June 28, Old Calendar — both in Greece and Russia. It is interesting to note that the Greek Church as a whole has regarded Augustine with less reserve than the Russian Church. In the official calendar of one of the Old-Calendarist Greek Churches, Augustine is referred to as not the Blessed Augustine but Saint Augustine the Great — *agios Augustinos o megas* (Rose 79). Furthermore, it is significant that the Dismissal Hymn chanted in the Orthodox Church on June 15, the Feast of Saint Augustine is as follows:

O Blessed Augustine, you have been proved to be a bright vessel of the divine Spirit and revealer of *The City of God*; you have also righteously served the Savior as a wise hierarch who has received God. O righteous father, pray to Christ God that he may grant to us great mercy.

### Saint Augustine's theology of sin

The biblical teaching on Original Sin was not developed until the time of Augustine. Augustine portrayed "Original Sin," a term he coined, as a condition in which the whole human race finds itself, but from which only some individuals are redeemed by a thoroughly voluntary act of God's benevolence. Although God desires the salvation of all in Christ, only those who are justified by faith and baptism are actually saved.

Augustine linked Original Sin with concupiscence, the human person's spontaneous desire for material or sensual satisfaction. He saw in concupiscence, which itself is a consequence of Original Sin, the material element of Original Sin (Ott 111). As a result, concupiscence for Augustine is an effect of Original Sin and is imparted through sexual intercourse, that is, by the libido in the parents' love by which a person first comes into the world. Augustine never worked out the congenital difference between original and personal sin, because for him the consequences of both kinds of sin are the same in the next world.

Eastern Orthodox understanding of Original Sin is dissimilar from the West, and the significance of the sin of Adam and its consequences for humankind is understood quite differently. Eastern Orthodoxy's assertion that humanity's definitive goal is *theosis*, or participation in the divine life, has informed and shaped Eastern Orthodox theology of the Fall of humankind. Sin in the East is viewed as a personal act, never as an act of nature (Meyendorff 143). So, Orthodox theologians support this notion of sin by differentiating between person and nature. They reason that though humanity possesses the freedom to sin through an act of the will, humanity's nature, or humanity's final goal, is to be in communion with God.

As a consequence, the disobedience of Adam and Eve against God could be conceived only as their individual sin, so there is no place for the notion of innate culpability in Orthodoxy. There is consent in Greek patristic and

Byzantine traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an inheritance essentially of mortality rather than of sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality (Meyendorff 145). Thus Adam and Eve are not culpable, through their sin, for universal peccability, but for universal dying, a death that each man merited through his own sin (Pelikan 182). Adam's personal sin did not bring damnation upon all people; instead, it brought death upon all people. This mortality resulted in an increased proclivity to sin, but only because humanity was subject to physical needs. The sin of Adam and Eve created the impediment of mortality between God and humanity. Thus, humanity's mortality makes people predisposed to sin.

Given this idea that humanity's basic problem is mortality, the Orthodox view of redemption is much more far-flung than that of the Western Church. Western theological tradition emphasizes the judicial aspect of salvation, asserting that in salvation, God is primarily concerned with the remission of sin. The Orthodox view is that the Gospel is not primarily the solution to man's problem with personal sin. Instead, it is God's provision of divine life in Christ, the beginning of *theosis*. A residual benefit of beginning the process of deification is the remission of sins. Baptism is the means by which the believer enters into this new life. God and solely God could do away with the barrier of mortality. God removed this obstacle through the incarnation of Christ. For Sergius Bulgakov, the Incarnation is an assertion that the Fall did not destroy human nature and that its perfection is attainable. After the Incarnation, humanity can again recognize itself for what it was created to be: one with God. Christ re-united within himself all persons, not as they were in sin, but as they were created to be. So the path of humanity's divinization was made clearer than ever in Jesus Christ.

It is clear that there is a difference in interpretation between the East and the West regarding the theology of Original Sin, which can be partly explained by a difference in mentality between the two segments of Christendom. The areas of divergence also point toward other areas of difference, which, although doctrinal at times, are more profoundly reflective of everyday attitudes and beliefs in the East and West.

Finding fault with Augustine and the honesty of his theological investigation regarding Original Sin shows a lack of a true Christian spirit and charity. It is undeniable that Augustine made remarkable contributions to Christian thought, including the theology of sin. Probably the heresy hunters will find *The Confessions*, the history of Augustine's own conversion, helpful in their path to the conversion of their hearts.

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# THE DESIRE FOR GOD VS. MODERN STRATEGIES FOR JUSTICE

by Stephen Martin

Our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee.

— Augustine *Confessions* (1.1)

What meaning do these words have for contemporary issues in social and economic justice? For his time Augustine answered by posing the praxis of citizenship in the “City of God” against the praxis of power of the Roman Empire. Since then Augustine’s metanarrative has provided inspiration and guidance for several, sometimes widely divergent, Christian ethicists posing the love of God against the various corruptions of that desire found in the variously conceived iterations of the “City of Man.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides his knowledge of Augustine, the two things that impressed me most in John Cavadini’s lectures were 1) his focus on Augustine’s critique of culture in *The Confessions*; and 2) his view that despite contention between Augustinians and Thomists, Augustine and Aquinas offer complementary and necessary perspectives. Agreeing with Cavadini that the best way to interpret Augustine is to develop him, but being more of a Thomist, in my essay I investigate these two notions in a brief summary of the Radical Orthodox theologian Daniel M. Bell Jr.’s important, provocative and controversial *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering*.<sup>2</sup> Bell critiques liberation theology for its modernist divorcing of social justice from the proper love for God (Augustine) and the proper meaning of justice (Aquinas).

Bell takes up liberation theology’s critique of capitalism as corruption of desire for God but criticizes the liberationists’ emphasis on justice instead of forgiveness as a “technology” of authentic desire for God in seeking to heal the abuses caused by the technology of desire of capitalism. Here, I am only able do scant “justice” to his well-written and thoroughly documented account. Despite an inspiring effort to quicken resistance to capitalism by calling attention to the cry of the poor in the grips of “rapacious desires in the form of environmental degradation, resource depletion, starvation wages, harsh working conditions, low intensity conflict and military bases” (168), liberation theology has unfortunately capitulated to liberal understandings of social change in its attempt to achieve revolutionary change, Bell argues. This is because liberal society itself, including its understandings of justice, has been deformed through capitalism. First, liberationists have failed in their attempt to remedy injustice through politics as statecraft; because this cannot be successful, the church of the poor effectively has “evacuate[d] the public realm” (62). This critique has reverberated from Karl Marx through post-modernism, and like other Radical Orthodox theologians, Bell relies heavily on the latter to illumine and correct Christian practice. The second critique, incorporating Bell’s more original insight, is that forgiveness instead of justice is both theologically and effectively the proper Christian response to injustice perpetrated on the poor; through forgiveness the poor assert their role on the stage of history, just as Francis Fukuyama and his fellow neoconservatives celebrate the end of it with the “triumph” of capitalism.

Bell discusses Gilles Deleuze’s postmodern analysis of the capitalist discipline of desire: that contemporary capitalism exercises its influence not only through manipulation of market arrangements and creation of wealth, but (to the extent it successfully ontologically captures and forms desire in the social conscious and unconscious) through its “ensemble of ideas, institutions, and social arrangements erected and propagated by state, party, class, etc.” Any resistance therefore that fails to recognize this “micropolitics of desire” by privileging the “state as the fulcrum of social and political change” is doomed to failure (13). The failure of politics as statecraft (a la Max Weber) is extended in Bell’s use of Michel Foucault’s analysis of “governmentality.”<sup>3</sup> Similar to Deleuze, Foucault talks about “technologies of the self” that worked along with the collapse of “state reason” as the economy began

to exceed its grasp (e.g., market relations are now coordinated by Adam Smith's invisible hand, rather than government). Governmentality through the market assisted by technologies of the self, replaces governmental reason. This governmentality works through "insur[ing] that individual freedom is exercised in ways appropriate to the optimal functioning of the economy" (29). Economic neoliberalism in this sense is the goal of political liberalism, having mutated into repression instead of freedom.

Combining Foucault and Deleuze, Bell states,

From this account we see humanity delivered to the capitalist order by means of a vast matrix of technologies of power that extend across the social field and are not identified with the state apparatuses ... desire is captured by capitalism ... not merely by the repressive capacity of the state but also through the exercise of a pastoral power operative in a multitude of technologies of desire promoted in various spaces of enclosure (prison, factory, school, home), human sciences, civic programs, practices, organizations and so forth (32).

Rather than desire being restless for God, sin has distorted desire, capturing it and bending it "in accord with the golden rule of production for the market" (2).<sup>4</sup>

Is there a therapy that Christianity can provide for this distortion of desire and its deleterious effects on the poor and the common good? Liberation theology, taking its cue from Catholic social teaching (though it has been very critical of it in other ways), relies on the classical notion of justice as *suum cuique* ("to each his own") in applying concepts of social justice to counter savage capitalism. Nevertheless, justice, defined by Aquinas as "the perpetual and constant will to render each one his right," for Thomas occurs in a social context of communal relations — an umbrella which encompasses commutative justice and distributive justice but is to neither irreducible (102).<sup>5</sup> Despite modern Catholic teaching explicitly critiquing economic society in terms of social justice, it eventually adopted the modern discourse of rights, which stresses justice as primarily distributive ("to each his/her own"). This only plays into capitalism's discipline of desire as primarily acquisitive: Both justice and the market encourages desire to claim its rights. Theological anthropology becomes neoliberal economic anthropology: "Individuals," Bell writes, "became essentially proprietors" in both the market and church (105).

Another problem is that, despite the liberationists' witness to God's action on behalf of the poor in Scripture, God's justice as found in the Bible does not distribute according to his/her own, but rather as gift; as instantiated in the temporal realm, it comes about through just persons and communities of shared love. Thus Bell maintains the liberationist theory of justice as *suum cuique* "is inadequate insofar as it lacks sustained attention to the host of technologies of desire necessary for the formation of just persons of shared love" (124). Only through its own technologies of desire (not only liturgy, sacraments, orders, discipleship and prayer but also an ensemble of inter-, intra-and extra-personal technologies such as knowledge, instruments, persons, systems of judgment, buildings and spaces, etc.) can Christianity fund resistance to capitalism and "assume its place in the temporal realm as the true politics, the exemplary form of human community." Only when a desire for God inspired by grace results in forgiveness transcending and ascending over modern conceptions and implementations of "justice," is there inaugurated a "different economy for dealing with the sin of injustice ... inflicted by the capitalist discipline" (144). "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

Given that forgiveness can and has been used as the basis of theological justification programs and the poor are used to being offered peace where there is none, how can forgiveness be superior to modern strategies of justice and worth the risk of enacting? Isn't the first priority of the Christian to defend the victims of injustice by struggling for justice? These questions presuppose that repentance and conversion precede forgiveness. Bell argues instead that theologically and practically forgiveness leads to conversion and repentance, and thus is primary to justice.<sup>6</sup> By refusing to respond to offenses not in terms what is due (which can lead to violence), forgiveness renounces equivalent counterforce, transforms the situation, and creates the possibility for the

emergence of something new. As opposed to modern “justice,” forgiveness is “successful at shaping desire in a way that it does not mutate into proprietary, acquisitive force” and instead can “fund resistance to instead of conforming to capitalism” (152).

Like the suffering servant in Isaiah, the church of the poor is chosen as sacrament and instrument of salvation (168). Instead of demanding what is due them from having to bear the crucifixion perpetrated upon them by the First World’s rapacious desire, the poor of the Third World are able to offer forgiveness in the form of confession, repentance and penance.<sup>7</sup> Confession acknowledges that God’s judgment of sin is a judgment of grace; confession requires a need for truthfulness about one’s self and one’s involvement in personal and structural sin. Furthermore, when oppressors repent they are in effect renouncing the option for the wealthy (178). Bell also points out that the poor are faced with challenge of repenting of their lack of faith in God that leads to a pervasive hopelessness and resignation in face of oppression: “The last possibility open to them is not the last possibility open to God” (179).

Performing repentance and penance as further therapies of desire involved in forgiveness leads back to Aquinas’ notion that the unity and reconciliation in a community of shared love is the key to justice. Through these, forgiveness will involve distribution and redistribution of goods because “unity of persons, sociality of desire, that forgiveness intends and penance fosters is not something that occurs in isolation from the way in which material goods are used and distributed” (183).

Through forgiveness, through the refusal to cease suffering, the “Church of the poor is extending God’s gift of forgiveness and redirecting desire towards its true end: the shared love that is friendship in God” (171), combining Augustine and Aquinas in a way foreign and even subversive to many modern Christian conceptions of social justice. As Bell writes,

“No longer is rendering what is due a matter of division of resources among rivalrous desires; rather it is about the arrangement of resources of life in such a way that divine donation of love that is desire continues to flow [Augustine], ever intensifying the conviviality that is the communion of humanity in God” (188) and on earth [Aquinas].

In places such as pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans and others in the U.S. — where the First World looks increasingly like the Third — forgiveness may seem like a woefully inadequate way to combat injustice. But recognition of the poor “confessed” to us by Katrina may lead us to something infinitely more radical than politics as statecraft as usual practiced by both Democrats and Republicans: grace, and at least repentance and penance instead of politicians, Halliburton, etc. divvying up the spoils of society’s defeat.

## Notes

1. For a few examples, see Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*; H.R. Niebuhr’s classic *Christ and Culture*, Chapter 6, “Christ as Transformer of Culture”; John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*; and Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*.

2. (London: Routledge, 2001), 240 pp. Pages in parentheses refer to Bell. If I had more space I would offer my mostly sympathetic critique that Bell, while discussing well the healing aspect of forgiveness, does not mention the concomitant and equally necessary role for “creating” — using transformed reason to help build systems that truly reflect human freedom and transcendence. (See Bernard Lonergan, “Healing and Creating in History,” in *Third Collection*, ed. Frederick Crowe). At least Bell does not seek to forestall such attempts the way his fellow Radical Orthodox theologians John Milbank (*Theology and Social Theory: Faith and Secular Reason*) and D. Stephen Long (*The Divine Economy: Theology and the Market*) do.

3. The works of Deleuze and Foucault that Bell cites are too numerous to list here.

4. In Deleuze’s terms and historical framework, desire is first territorialized for the sake of the sovereign, state, and/or common good; then de-territorialized by nascent capitalism as economic relationships overcome national boundaries and control; free from any external control, raw capitalism then re-territorializes desire for consumption for the market where any strict distinctions among the economic, state, and moral-cultural collapse. Bell’s book is an attempt to teleologize desire for sake of God and community, especially the poor.

5. *Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, 58.1.

6. Bell acknowledges that although liberationists give great consideration to forgiveness, nevertheless by making justice primary, forgiveness is rendered moot.

7. Like everyone, the poor must also make the preferential option for the poor by resisting any potential to become oppressors and/or allow “subsystems of crucifixion” to proliferate among them (178).

# CONFESSIONS, TESTIMONIES AND OTHER MATTERS OF LAW DERIVED FROM SAINT AUGUSTINE

by Demetra M. Pappas

The opportunity to participate in the seminar titled “Augustine [of Hippo, not Canterbury] on Reading Culture,” by John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame, organized by the Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall, was irresistible. Much is made that Anglo-American law is derived from Judaeo-Christian ethic, yet legal education in both the U.S. and the U.K. have left me on the whole bereft of knowledge of those origins. I say this as a matter of fact, in the legal sense of that phrase — i.e., it is a fact that I have heard much, but been taught little, in the course of legal study for the practice of law, a further master’s dealing with criminology and criminal justice policy, and with doctoral work in law and sociology.

Thus it is only proper that I make a confession of my own, at the outset, consistent with the title of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* and with my former life as a criminal lawyer. I am not a theologian, nor am I learned in religious studies. I view life as refracted through the lens of a lawyer, trained at a Jesuit university, practiced in a secular world. I trust in those at the seminar who have greater knowledge than my own in theology and religious studies (read, everyone in the room) to provide those perspectives.

As a socio-legal academic, I find that there is precious little in general texts from which I may draw much information. For example, in *Law and the Legal System/Case Studies in the Anthropology of Law*, there were few books from which to choose, and that which was of the greatest recency and breadth, *Law and Anthropology: A Reader*, Sally Falk Moore (ed.) (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. 2005), had only the most minimal of material. Of this 360-plus page book, there was but one chapter, devoted to “Plato, Augustine, Aquinas and Others, Asking What is Morally Right.” In this chapter, Augustine received approximately one page of writing (on page 8) to the effect that Augustine had contrasted the law of the “city of god,” with the “city of men,” and that the ideal law was that of God.

Hence, going into the seminar, I was interested in learning what was being talked about. Only during my readings did the irony emerge when reading Book 5:14.24, Augustine chided himself for “not [being] interested in learning what he was talking about ... [because Augustine’s] ears were only for his rhetorical technique.” Both Henry Chadwick’s interpretation of *The Confessions* for Oxford World’s Classics and Professor John Cavadini’s discussion of Augustine, addressed this skilled man, so trained and adept in the art of rhetoric (in my notes, I write “lyrical”) as to be a professional rhetorician, who had legal access and judicial power. My readings were instructive as to modern law, especially criminal law, and to social constructions of the law, in the literal word. These will be working their way into my research and into my teaching.

For example, there is the exam question that will be showing up next semester on the take-home essay in “Crime, Law and Society,” “Saint Augustine writes in Book 2:2:3 of his *Confessions*, that he ‘could not have been wholly content to confine sexual union to acts intended to procreate children, as [God’s] law prescribes.’ Discuss in legal terms relating to a current controversy pertaining to unlawful marriages.”

The current summer semester class in “Understanding Society” is benefiting from the seminar, by way of a group reading and discussion of the C. Wright Mills sociological essay “The Promise.” This is based in large part on Cavadini’s style of presentation, and directed conversation. (Of course, Dr. Anthony Scigliano’s gracious Seminar Notes to the group also fostered me in this enterprise.) Would a reading of St. Augustine himself, and of Book 2 and the Pear Tree be a wonderful way to consider a classical lawyer in a modern context of crime and punishment, or should I focus upon how a mob mentality can develop in this context?

Will my class in “Crime and Civil Rights” appreciate the discussion of *mens rea* (legal intent) and its derivative constructs from Book 10:8.12 — how the mens relates to the mind, the capacity, the awareness and to the law?

Will my grant work on “Uses of Demeanor as a Socio-Legal Research Tool and as an Instructional Device” be altered by Cavadini’s discussion about ways to read and inflect Augustine’s writing in Book 1; and as to signs as a transfer of information and/or will; and that signs are never neutral, but rather subject to an attitude, or approach or interpretation?

I am not a theologian (redux) or a religious studies scholar (redux). As a lawyer, reading the work of another legally trained mind, I am preparing to study in new ways, and to introduce that possibility into the conversations with my students and my research writings. As a sociological academic, I am contemplating the cultural contexts given to current issues and debates as against social norms from ancient and modern perspectives, some of which may not be so very different today. Certainly, these are inviting intellectual avenues, and I look forward to issuing the invitation to the students and the readers along.



# AUGUSTINE, GOD AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

by Howard F. McGinn

When I was 17, I entered the monastery. More accurately, I entered the novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine, commonly called the Augustinians. For one year and one day I was perched in a cloistered compound overlooking the Hudson River in New Hamburg, N.Y., learning how to be a monk. In that autumn of 1961, I entered the monastic life with enormous enthusiasm and an overblown sense of piety. The peaceful life above the Hudson seemed to be the exact place for me to learn the rule of the Order, master the art of meditation, dress up in white robes, and find God in 366 days.

The 366 days unraveled exactly as I had hoped. I immersed myself in the prayers and practices of this ancient Order and by the time I pronounced my simple vows in September of 1962, I had become, in my mind, a “super” monk. I knew the prayers for putting on my robes; I had memorized parts of Augustine’s Rule; I had mastered the intricacies of the pre-Vatican II Office. God, however, remained distant. There was one time at Matins on Feb. 14 that I felt that I had figured out how to find God and for that one day, I probably did. But on Feb. 15, God was back to His practice of being distant. During the year, at the readings during meals, I first heard Augustine’s prayer from the Book I of *The Confessions*, “our heart is not at rest until it rests in you” (1.1). In 1961, I thought I knew what this meant. In 2003, I finally began to understand what Augustine meant.

That year, I conducted research into the job satisfaction of African-American librarians who work in public libraries. I interviewed black librarians, all women, working in urban public library systems in Midwestern, Northeastern, and New England states. I entered into the research suspecting I knew the answer to my questions. I knew that black librarians would like doing their work because of the opportunities to help people. I knew that these same people would probably report being subjected to serious discrimination by their supervisors, fellow employees, and people who used the library. My findings confirmed my suspicions. Black librarians did enjoy their work. Black librarians did experience serious workplace discrimination. But I was totally surprised by one of my findings. Most of the black librarians I spoke with viewed the hostile workplace as the place they encountered God. Their expressions of belief were very simple and straightforward.

In the following sequences I am the questioner “Q.” Listen to the words of some of the women interviewed:

A. “I take them [my beliefs] with me everywhere I go. Before I come to a building God is with me. My religious beliefs are my everything. I believe that’s what keeps me through the day ... going through the day. If I don’t have God with me no matter ... I don’t know what would happen. Sometimes I have to take breath prayers, especially ... .”

Q. “What is a breath prayer?”

A. “‘Thank You.’ ‘Hallelujah.’ I call them breath phrases, breath prayers, something to that effect. It lets me take a deep moment ... a moment to gather myself. Sometimes people come to you and you think that they’re attacking you personally and it’s something totally ... something irrelevant ... something that doesn’t have anything ... that doesn’t have anything to do with me.

“So I have to kind of step outside of myself and say, ‘OK, well what is the problem? What are they trying to ask me? What’s the result of what they are trying to get to?’ So ... I’m a constant reader of my Bible. I believe in my heart that I’m actually putting Jesus’ applications through my daily work. I don’t just do it on Sunday and leave it there and then take it ... pick it back up on Monday.”

Q. This is very much a part of you?

A. "Exactly. Exactly."

When I asked this woman whether she would be satisfied in her job no matter how difficult the work environment may be she replied that she would. In her written document, submitted six weeks after the interview, she reaffirmed the role religious belief played in her attaining job satisfaction.

A. "Religion definitely has a huge role to play in my job satisfaction. Before I start my work day, I thank God for my job and ask Him to order my steps in the right direction and make [me] an instrument of His peace. I'm grounded and firmly planted; therefore when situations with difficult patrons, staff, etc. come about, I know that it's not really them reacting, but a unsettled spirit within them. It helps me to look at people differently and to love them by being kind to them in spite of how they're reacting.

"At the end of the day, I feel complete because it has been a day that God especially designed for me, and the people that I've come in contact with was meant to be. Many times, I find that people need an encouraging word, and a smile. God has allowed me to do that, and it doesn't cost me anything. His love fills me and I try to let that radiate from the inside to the outside so that others may feel it too, no matter the color or the age."

Another woman felt that God contributed to her job satisfaction and would protect her from a bad work environment.

A. "I really don't feel that God would place me in a 'bad work environment.' I feel that God has blessed me with my current position ... despite some of the things that are challenging. This is one reason why I have remained in this position. My faith in God plays a significant role in achieving job satisfaction, transfer and promotion."

In this next quotation, a woman described in stark terms, how religion helped her cope with workplace discrimination.

A. "It's like, you know, thank God that I know I'm a child of a king — that it doesn't ... you know you're not hurting me. ... It hurts but it's not hurting me in the sense that, you know, if this is all I have to go through to get on my journey to where I'm going, then so be it. And that's just the way I see it."

I should have anticipated the importance of the religious beliefs of these women. In African-American culture, religion is incorporated into daily life seamlessly. Williams and Dixie (2003) note, "religion in the African-American tradition is still both a tool of survival and an inspiring 'terrible swift sword' of justice. There is no separation between Sunday morning and the rest of the week. All life is spiritual and every breath is full of faith in God as an all-powerful, ever-present force" (5).

I am coming to understand that the "rest" my heart seeks in God is to be found in God's presence in my daily life. African-Americans seem to have this special spiritual ability to find God in the occurrences of their day. When I have thought about Augustine's comment over the years of my life, the God Augustine spoke of was distant, a prize at the end of the rainbow. I am learning to seek my rest in the presence of God in my daily encounters with the Mystical Body of Christ.

### **Work Cited**

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## CONTRIBUTORS

*A. D. Amar* is a professor for strategy and policy and the director of MBA assessment in the Stillman School of Business. His area of research interest is knowledge-based resource management. He decided to attend the Augustine seminar to expand his understanding of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

*Charles E. Carter* is professor of religious studies and chair of the RELS department. He holds a doctorate from Duke University in Hebrew Bible and archaeology and is in his 13th year as a faculty member at Seton Hall. His research interests include social science approaches to the Hebrew Bible and the history and social context of the Persian period. He served as the Catholic Biblical Association Visiting Professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem in 2002-03.

*Colleen Conway* is a member of the religious studies department. Her interests include New Testament and early Christianity in the context of the Roman Empire, gender studies, and literary theory. Her current research project is on the relationship between the ideology of masculinity in the first century Greco-Roman culture and presentations of Jesus in the New Testament.

*Nancy Enright* has been teaching full-time at Seton Hall since 1988. She holds a doctorate in English literature from Drew University (1986). She has published an article on Tolkien in *College English Notes* and on Dante in *Logos*. She serves as director of first year writing and is involved in the Catholic Studies program, as well as the faculty senate.

*Albert B. Hakim* is professor emeritus of philosophy and former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He is author of *Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, now in its fifth edition. He has participated in the Summer Seminars several times and has enjoyed them all. He stated: "Apropos of this summer's on Saint Augustine, I'd like to note that my doctoral dissertation (Oh, so many years ago!) was on the notion of society in the philosophy of Saint Augustine."

*Nathaniel Knight* is an associate professor in the department of history and director of the Russian and East European studies program. In addition to his specialized courses in Russian history, he regularly teaches Western civilization. Because Saint Augustine figures prominently in the first half of the course, Knight welcomed the opportunity to deepen his understanding by attending the seminar.

*Monsignor Richard M. Liddy* is the University Professor of Catholic Thought and Culture and director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall. He is also a member of the religious studies department. His doctoral dissertation was on the work of the American philosopher Susanne K. Langer. In 1993, he published a work on Bernard Lonergan titled *Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan*. He is presently writing another book on his own personal appropriation of Lonergan's work. He has also written on the thought of John Henry Newman. He is interested in the topics of art, education, formation and church leadership.

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*Ines Angjeli Murzaku* is an associate professor of religious studies. She specializes in ecclesiastical history focusing on Eastern Orthodox historical theology, monastic studies, and Eastern spirituality. Her interest in the seminar was to better understand some of the reservations raised against Saint Augustine by Eastern Orthodox theologians, especially Augustinian theology of sin.

*Demetra M. Pappas* holds degrees in law and criminal justice policy. She teaches in the department of sociology and anthropology, with an emphasis on criminology, law and medical issues in society. Her research includes emerging criminal law, criminalization/decriminalization, alternative dispute resolution, administrative law, dramaturgy in the law, and legal history. A primary reason for her interest in the Saint Augustine Seminar is her desire to learn more about the Judaeo-Christian roots of Anglo-American law.

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*Stan R. Tyvoll* is an assistant professor in the department of philosophy. His courses include Medieval Philosophy, Aquinas, Ethics and Logic. Tyvoll is interested in the relationship of medieval philosophy to contemporary issues in metaphysics and philosophy of religion. His publications include two recent articles on Anselm's theory of free will: "An Anselmian-Quiescence Approach to the Problem of Grace and Merit," in *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 7 (2004): 35-58, and "Anselm's Definition of Free Will: A Hierarchical Interpretation," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, forthcoming.