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## Augustine on Heart and Life

### Essays in Memory of William Harmless, S.J.

Edited by John J. O’Keefe and Michael Cameron

## 11. Not so Alien and Unnatural After All

### The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine’s Sermons<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

One typically reads that deification, or *theosis*, was the view held among the Eastern churches and something quite foreign to the West. In such works one finds Augustine presented as the preeminent champion of ransom theory as the way of understanding redemption. But then one reads in *The City of God*, “God Himself, the blessed God, who is the giver of blessedness, became partaker of our human nature, and thus offered us a short cut to participation in His own divine nature.” This sounds suspiciously like deification. Could this really be there? In fact, yes, and it is what one should expect to find in Augustine. How could others’ readings of Augustine missed this? Such have arguably been preoccupied with only one portion of

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a minor revision of Rosenberg 2017. I am grateful to the editors and publishers of the earlier publication as well as this one for allowing me to present this emendation in memory of Father Bill Harmless.

Augustine's works – his books, unduly emphasized the anti-Pelagian writings, and confused Augustine's doctrine of redemption with later formulations of the High Middle Ages, the Reformation, and especially Protestant scholasticism.

A handful of scholars have begun to strip away this misunderstanding, demonstrating that Augustine held to some form of *deificatio*. They have had to justify this very substantial change of interpretation on a relatively small group of texts from Augustine's doctrinal treatises. However, more than a few sermons are also available for them to work with; when understood in context, I argue, these sermons suggest that deification is far more central to Augustine's thought than a mere enumeration of doctrinal passages suggests. Further, this article argues that Augustine's cosmology and especially his privation theory of evil are foundational to the bishop's broader theological development. By understanding Augustine's view of a primal formation and a fall which corrodes the originate state which must be reformed, one realizes that the notion of deification was central to Augustine's pastoral concerns, and that his understanding of it as providing the means for healing the corruption endemic within postlapsarian humans who retain some degree of the *imago dei*. This theological vision, then, is neither accidental nor incidental. Therefore, even if his use of deification is not as prevalent or developed as thoroughly as that found among the Cappadocian authors, one should understand this approach as a critical aspect of his doctrine of atonement.

Keywords: redemption, atonement, deification, theosis, sermons, preaching, privation, ransom, orality, cosmology, imago dei, participation, corruption

## Foreword

Attending the North American Patristic Society Annual Conference in 1989 at Loyola University in Chicago, I met Bill Harmless through our mutual friend and colleague, John O'Keefe. Bill and I quickly became dialogue partners and formed a deep friendship with shared and diverse interests, common friends, and of course, a common commitment to understanding and engaging with the work of Augustine. Indeed, we shared a particular interest in the bishop's sermons and focused close scrutiny in a number of ways.

Bill, without doubt, was further down the road – he was often well ahead of many of us – having completed his work on catechesis and moving on to new topics. But the stuff of common commitment and vision was there. Bill's vigorous mind, ability to range freely across a wide intellectual and cultural landscapes, his enthusiasm about his studies (and his music!), and his deep learning could have allowed him to intimidate others. He did not do that, however, as these were tempered by his vision for goodness, commitment to pursue truth, mission to contribute substantively to the students under his charge, along with his pastoral care and charity toward others, winsome humility, and ready wit, all of which was wrapped into passion for deep Christian formation. These moulded him into a man of depth, a minister with compassion, and a scholar of great merit, a colleague and friend whom I admired and enjoyed immensely. His passing is a profound loss to us, though, I have no doubt, a great gain to him as he now perhaps presses Augustine on the rhetoric of jazz.

Bill contributed to my early thinking on the topic of this paper, though whether he would have agreed with it in the final analysis, I cannot say. Any weaknesses or flaws in the analysis are mine but the interest in the subject was, and is, most certainly ours.

### Contesting the Standard Model: *Deification* as Essentially Alien to Augustine and the Latin West.

Only in recent years and among certain small group of scholars would you expect to find Augustine included in a discussion of deification. Though there were exceptions to this before the beginning of the millenium, they were surprisingly few in number; and a paucity of materials on almost any topic in Augustine is always a surprise.<sup>2</sup> Recent years have seen more particular attention to situating the theological reflections in the Fathers' own time period. This has led to many departures from previous held certainties. Recent histories of theology have begun to strip away one of these certainties, though not yet sufficiently in terms of broader impact: the notion that Augustine championed ransom theory as the key to describing the process of redemption and individual identity in Christ. These studies show that this view either confuses Augustine's redemption doctrine with formulations in the High Middle Ages and Reformation periods, or treats him as a natural, inevitable precursor of such later formulations.

In other words, numerous older general explanations of Augustine's theological anthropology, spirituality, and soteriology essentially situate him among much later interpreters, rather than in his own time and within his own theological development. In particular, one finds *deification* was treated with caution, described as alien to the Western Christian tradition, an Eastern invention, and a throwback to an inappropriate dependence on Plato; in other words, deification, where found in the West, was seen as an ill-considered import.

Unsurprisingly, then, deification is a missing component in many explanations of Augustine's theological framework and the shaping of the Western tradition.<sup>3</sup> While it is not prominent in Augustine's works, this teaching is presented both directly and also indirectly and subtly.<sup>4</sup> We have missed this emphasis, perhaps, partly due to a key methodological mistake: ignoring the oral-aural context for the development of doctrine and a primary medium for theological reflection, the sermon. Sermons contributed substantially to early doctrine and are critical to understanding both the views of the preachers and the religious

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<sup>2</sup> See Bonner; Teske; Reta; Chadwick. Norman Russell briefly notes Augustine (325-32). One should also note an earlier work by Victorino Capánaga; and an unpublished dissertation by Jan A. A. Stoop.

<sup>3</sup> So, for example, Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology*, which appeared in a third edition in 2013 (orig. 1983, quoted here). In this standard text used in many North American seminaries, one finds the following: "The theory [of atonement] with the greatest claim to having been the standard view in the early history of the church is probably the so-called ransom theory. Gustaf Aulén has called it the classic view, and in many ways that designation is correct, for in various forms it dominated the church's thinking until the time of Anselm and Abelard" (792-93). Similarly, see Lewis and Demarest: 372-73, 378-79. Indeed, neither of these systematic theologies shows any interest in or knowledge of *deificatio*, even when citing its main proponents, including Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine. Both works cite Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* as a key resource.

<sup>4</sup> While one does not expect Latin writers to use terms related to *deificatio*, given the grave pagan religious concerns that might be inferred from the appropriation of such notions for imperial apotheosis (i.e., treating emperors as divine), Augustine nonetheless makes limited use of the term. It appears in five sermons (*En. Ps.* 49.2, 117.11; *S.* 126, 166, 23B.1-3) and in a handful of other works, including *Civ.* 19.23.

views of the broader culture. Those who miss the significance of this issue, and thus miss the sermons as a source for Augustine's thought, fail to adequately situate his views on redemption within his wider theological system.

Such mistakes of interpretation arise when we read the ancients through the eyes of later theologians who represent themselves (in this case, wrongly) as offering a teaching consistent with a prior master. In my own Protestant tradition, the Reformers offer many examples of such misreadings and some scholars have allowed such to shape our readings (e.g., Calvin's particular use of predestination). Karl Barth apparently failed to see the significance or understand the nature of deification in Augustine's work and theology. His only engagement with it amounts to suggesting it could not mean an ontological transformation<sup>5</sup> – which is, of course, not part of Augustine's thinking, nor that of any of the Fathers, for that matter; that represents a modern, Western concern for what such a notion might entail. Arguing as Barth does that Augustine's position is somehow equivalent to the Reformation definition of justification leads him to a far too limited understanding of Augustine, and makes the mistake of reading the bishop's doctrine through the lens of the Reformation and its successive elaborations of justification.<sup>6</sup> In stating what it obviously was not, Barth fails to go on to acknowledge its positive function in Augustine's theology. Such mistakes happen when one places ancient writers in certain expected frameworks, or reads their work back through the perspective of later "authoritative" authors like certain Reformers.

In short, I wish to argue three points:

1. The sermonic context for interpreting this issue in Augustine is critical. Augustine's preaching covered a wide range of subjects and levels, and included technical and fundamental theology, doctrines, and practices. However, he rarely took up issues that he considered "experimental." That deification features in sermons in particular argues for its centrality *and normality* in his theology and in North African theology of the time.

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<sup>5</sup> Barth states, "In the same sense Augustine had already been able to say that in man's *justificatio* in so far as it makes us God's children, a *deificatio* takes place, though he does not neglect to add the comment: *sed hoc gratiae est adoptantis non naturae generantis* (*Enarr. in Ps.* 49.2). Neither in Augustine nor in Luther is there anything about a deification in faith in the sense of a changing of man's nature into the divine nature. What makes the expressions possible is the *apprehensio Christi* or *habitatio Christi in nobis* or *unio hominis cum Christo* that takes place in real faith according to the teaching of Gal. 2:20. In emphasizing this more than mystical and more than speculative principle that faith means union with what is believed, i.e., with Jesus Christ, Calvin did not lag in the least behind Luther nor either of them behind an Augustine, Anselm, or Bernard of Clairvaux. Without this principle it is impossible to understand the Reformation doctrine of justification and faith. How it was distinguished from the idea of an essential deification of man in the Reformation period may be seen especially from Calvin's controversy with A. Osiander (*Instit.*, III, 11, 5 f.); there can be no question of a *mixtura Christi cum fidelibus*" (240). Note the discussion of this in Neder: 13ff.

<sup>6</sup> G. Ladner's classic work, *The Idea of Reform*, continues to be a useful source for understanding the Augustinian theological framework beyond its later reception and transmutation. As important as it is in laying out critical foundations of Augustine's thought, essentially offering an intellectual basis for deification with its focus on *formatio*, *deformatio*, and *reformatio*, Ladner's book does not fully connect with and press home the notion of *deificatio* beyond some rather perfunctory comments (see 185-203).

2. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as shaped by Augustine's cosmological interpretations forms an obvious structure for deification; in it deification, rather than ransom theory on its own, is the clear and obvious understanding of his position.
3. The emphasis on privation theory for how Augustine understood the nature of evil argues for deification as the most appropriate way to manage a doctrine of redemption, understood as the manner of healing the distress, redressing the loss, and restoring the divine image within humanity corrupted by brokenness.

### Misreading Augustine: Discounting Sermons and the Oral Context

Why have Barth and others gone astray? A standard reading of the early Western church's doctrine of redemption sees it as rather unformed and lacking the greater sophistication of the later period initiated by Anselm, advanced by the analysis of the later Scholastics, and offered renewed coherence by both Reformed and later Catholic theologians. This early period of development primarily offers a position predicated on the idea of cultic sacrifice and emphasizes the concept of Christ's "ransom" from captivity. The doctrine of the Latin-speaking churches, it is thought, particularly emphasized that the death of Christ on the cross paid the punitive price of redemption. Such notions were further developed to emphasize the notion that this redemptive work satisfied divine demands. Jesus' triumph denied Satan some of his captives and led to the pillage of hell in which Christ reclaimed the faithful of old who were temporarily held by the enemy. Augustine championed the ransom theory, it was thought, and laid the foundations for the development of this interpretation. But does this standard reading wholly represent the bishop of Hippo?

Gustaf Aulén in 1931 played a key role giving voice and justification to this reading; he essentially repeated earlier views as the standard reading of patristic sources in his work, *Christus Victor*.<sup>7</sup> His history of the doctrine offered a study of Irenaeus and the relationship between his treatment of recapitulation and the notion of redemption; Irenaeus (and other Greek Fathers) focused on redemption as a means of restoring fellowship with God (Aulén: 25; see Steenberg). While Irenaeus likewise emphasizes the act of redemption ransoming humans from God's just punitive action, this is not the whole approach. Witness Irenaeus' famous words, "He became what we are so that we may become what he is" (*Adversus haereses* 4.33.4). This phrase becomes emblematic. The combination of considering the healing of guilt and the restoration of relationship laid the foundation on which the concept of "ransom" was built. Aulén contrasts Irenaeus' position with the Latin West's focus on ransom as a transaction to appease guilt.

Yet this approach also presents a problem. It reads later development and alterations in the West back into the earlier sources and into one source in particular, Augustine. One is easily tempted to interpret the historical development of the doctrine of atonement as inevitably leading toward Anselm's views on satisfaction and likewise into the still later views of *institia dei* among the Reformers. Falling prey to this temptation results in both interpreting and presenting earlier views as intellectual forebears that are judged in light of the evolutions

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<sup>7</sup> H. E. W. Turner's work has also played a formative role. Turner does acknowledge that Augustine had a basic notion of *deificatio*. But he sums it up in only two sentences, arguing that Augustine's view "lacks any of the refinements of corresponding Eastern developments of this tradition" (97).

of the idea. Assessments that follow this approach find it more difficult to look at earlier positions in their own right, and by looking for foundations of later thought risk missing the genius of earlier positions.

Failing to capture the genius of the position, one misses or misplaces the way in which Augustine was transfixed by the notion that the Creator would take on the form of that which he made *ex nihilo* in order that the very creation marred by rebellion and sin, deprived of its original purity and integrity, might be renewed in the divine image and likeness, and thus remade increasingly like unto God. Such a remade creature, then, is able once again to draw near and enjoy the Creator, the source of life and blessing.

Though the notion of “ransom” does describe the process which Augustine understood as an operative mechanism in the act of redemption, it only partially represents his view and incompletely describes his theological vision.<sup>8</sup> We must beware of reading back into Augustine concerns and *foci* that were particular to later periods or mere precursors of later developments. Not all have floundered at this point; certain significant studies better understand Augustine’s doctrine of redemption (see Burns 1976). As noted above, a handful of scholars in the last century addressed the notion of deification. To this one should add the recent substantial work by David Meconi.<sup>9</sup>

Prior generations preoccupied with reading Augustine’s theology primarily through his dogmatic treatises have confused the understanding of his thought and forced the reconstructions found in Bonner, Meconi, and others. Focusing on the sermon as its own genre and upon its oral-aural context helps to explain and expand upon the integrity and coherence of this reconstruction. There are key methodological and contextual implications in doing so. Attention to the sermons better enables us to interpret Augustine’s understanding of redemption. They are a central feature of his life and work, and so studies of other topics in Augustine would likewise benefit from a similar exploration of the oral-aural context and a close reading of the sermons that does not reduce them to being mere adjuncts to Augustine’s books. The methodological issue: we need to understand the essentially oral-aural context of his theological productions and the broader genre of literature one needs to work with, the sermons, in order to better understand Augustine’s theology. Such a focus resolves misunderstandings that result from a preoccupation with Augustine’s books, particularly in relation to readings of the the Pelagian debate, and to later developments of his doctrine. Conceptually two key building blocks undergird Augustine’s theological framework here and elsewhere: his understanding of cosmology, and his outworking of the problem of evil as a *privatio boni*. While both are crucial, and interrelated, the latter arguably touches upon, and deeply impacts nearly all core doctrines in Augustine’s thought.

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<sup>8</sup> For a contrary view, see Eugene Teselle’s argument for the validity of ransom theory over against those who want to discount it in favour of later approaches.

<sup>9</sup> This article supplements Meconi’s work. While agreeing on the centrality of the teaching in Augustine, I take up a different aspect of the bishop’s cosmology, and focus on additional issues: the genre of sermons, their oral-aural context as a forum for the discussion of deification, and *privatio boni* as a core underlying issue. Meconi and I also share an interest in the role of Augustine’s cosmology.

### **Playing the Whole Board: Sermons in Context**

In strategy-oriented board games, a classic mistake is failing to pay attention to the whole board. Focusing merely on one set of pieces or set of moves can lead to loss.<sup>10</sup> Many studies that present Augustine's thought more generally, and textbooks in particular, often focus primarily on Augustine's dogmatic works without attending to the very large body of other works he produced, the sermons (see Rosenberg 2010b, 2013). These works are not just other writings to be cited in a long list to supplement what is found in the dogmatic works. They form a unique genre of writing requiring special attention, interest, and interpretation. Partly, these other writings have not been readily available in translation until the last two or three decades; many sermons have appeared in English only in the last 25 years. The lack of translations is itself telling; they were largely placed at the bottom of the priority list. This lacuna has, perhaps, skewed the understanding of Augustine among those who do not read Latin. It also indicates which works receive (or do not receive) both popular and critical attention, since publishers and editors must set priorities and texts are assigned for which there is sufficient interest. Study of Augustine's thought without recourse to the pastoral writings treated in their own right necessarily omits their fuller context. To focus too quickly and extensively on Augustine's specifically dogmatic writings (such as those on predestination) risks blinding the reader to the whole picture and so not playing the whole board.

A methodological assumption stands in the way. Non-dogmatic works – including sermons, catechetical works, epistles, and exegetical writings – have begun to garner interest only in the last two decades. With regard to the place of the sermons, their exclusion evolves partly out of a debate in Late Antique studies over the gulf separating the literate and the illiterate, the intellectual elite and the commoners, the bishops and their congregations. Some take the view that these works are not serious forms of communication and do not represent significant sources of information either about the preacher or his audience; one should therefore turn to dogmatic treatises for the full elucidation of a writer's thought. What one finds in the sermons then is largely incidental. The validity of such opinions is not the issue here; but the dubious by-product is that many scholars regularly ignore the more popular materials – namely sermons and other forms of popular communication – offered by theologians who were, after all, active pastors and ecclesiastical leaders. In essence, by favoring dogmatic writings through our preoccupation with books, we prejudice our interpretations. When not ignored outright, this latter set of materials tends to be used merely as a means to correlate ideas, to add a (minor) supplement to our understanding of the writer, or to gather data about aspects of the social fabric, e.g., the presence of slavery.

This neglect of pastoral communications arguably impacts our understanding substantially. Interpretations of the major figures of late antiquity focuses on writings that were primarily occasional works written in response to a question or issue. Hence, their books cannot really be said to be either normative or regular forms of communication (even if they are extensive). Developing our understanding of the individual primarily through these materials – these occasional communications are often controversial by nature – not

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<sup>10</sup> I know this blunder from hard experience, losing at chess to friends who would be quite amused by my use of this analogy.

surprisingly leads to a perception that the individual was a controversialist. It also focuses on their concerns more narrowly than the person himself actually did, and so risks misconstruing their notions by lack of proper emphasis. These individuals were preachers in a society largely defined by oral pedagogy. To such pedagogy, then, one must turn to better understand their notions.

For example, Augustine's debate with Pelagius (and his followers) on freedom and predestination has profoundly shaped his reception and formed a perception that emphasizes his work as a controversialist. The received vision sees the stern patriarch arguing to the end of his days for a God who is immutable and must take any and all action on matters of reconciliation. Without doubt this significant debate preoccupied Augustine's attention and its gravity has profoundly shaped theology in the West. Near the end of a long and difficult episcopal ministry, Augustine was embroiled in a bitter struggle with one of his most intractable challengers, Julian of Eclanum. This debate was so significant, and so captured the interest of theologians, historians, and popular writers, that Augustine's comments have been treated as normative for his thought.

However, these works only partially represent Augustine's thought as they comprise only a small portion of his output. Augustine authored between 93 and 120 books, depending on what one counts as a book (all but one of these are extant); but he was also an extensive correspondent (308 letters are extant), and above all a preacher. He delivered between 4,000 and 10,000 sermons, many of which were recorded at the time by *notarii* or stenographers.<sup>11</sup> Preaching occurred on Saturdays as well as Sundays and feast days; he preached daily during Lent and the week following Easter. Some 900 of these sermons survive in full or part, having been offered extemporaneously or dictated ahead for his own use or for other preachers to emulate. His books, then, were occasional works (even if frequently and arduously produced). For a balanced and coherent understanding of Augustine's emphases, we must turn to the sermons for the context of his occasional books.<sup>12</sup>

### *Pedagogy and Preaching*

We do well to remember that Augustine was not an academic theologian but a pastor and bishop, and that much of his important work was carried out in the context of his ministerial duties (see Greer). There was a conscious attempt to form and inform an audience that was still largely influenced by paganism and for whom participation in pagan festivals, if not pagan cultic practice, was still an option.<sup>13</sup> The church had grown extensively during the fourth century, and there was a need to more fully immerse congregations in the foundations of a Christian worldview. Augustine considered the sermon to be an appropriate venue for both pastoral exhortation and doctrinal teaching. Manichaeans, Donatists, Pelagians, and pagan philosophers all received his attention at various times. The *Retractationes*, a brief compendium

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<sup>11</sup> See his comment in *En. Ps.* 51.1. P.-P. Verbraken estimated that Augustine delivered between 8,000 and 10,000 sermons; H. Drobner offers a lower but still large estimate of 4,000.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Harrison's recent work amounts to the first English language monograph to properly address this issue with respect to Augustine and provides much worth considering.

<sup>13</sup> See *J.* 198. Augustine delivers a sermon that would have been over three hours long in the attempt to keep parishioners from joining a pagan festival on the streets outside the basilica.

and review of all his works that Augustine wrote at the end of his life, offers a particularly telling comment. Regarding his replies to Adimantus, a disciple of Mani, he wrote, “I replied to certain questions [in writing], not once, but a second time. . . . Actually, I solved some of these questions in sermons delivered to the people in church. And, up to the present time, I have not yet replied to some” (*Retr.* 1.21; Bogan: 92-93).<sup>14</sup> Augustine clearly considered the congregation to be capable of understanding him, and thought the church service an appropriate forum for spirited persuasion. He considered the basilica, cathedra, and homily to be a venue, platform, and means wholly appropriate for responding to heretical writings. Augustine, at least, clearly placed the sermon *and its recipients* on a level equivalent to audience(s) of his dogmatic, exegetical, and apologetic works. The significance of this for shaping our view of the sermons is easily forgotten. His many sermons preached against various heterodox positions indicates the significance Augustine attached to the sermon as a venue for substantial discourse. Noteworthy among these are the sermons preached against the Platonists (*S.* 240-42). Further, at the end of his career, Augustine intended to review the sermons along with his 93 works. He concludes the *Retractationes* by saying that he intends to “re-examine my letters and my sermons to the people, the former dictated, the latter spoken” (*Retr.* 2.93; Bogan: 271); unfortunately, he never accomplished this review. He treated these as a substantial part of his legacy.

Augustine considered his homilies to be a serious forum for enquiry. They not only contended with substantial moral issues dealing with the practice of the Christian life; they also conveyed critical concepts, both the basic tenets of the faith as well as more substantial doctrinal issues. Yet sermons are easily overlooked when it comes to studying ancient authors. One reason for this may be the assumptions we bring to our study of ancient people. Public pedagogy is often treated in a rather cursory and even desultory fashion, for we have thought that the audiences were themselves insubstantial, a notion usually based on assessments of the degree of literacy found among the broader populace (see, e.g., Frend 1872, 1985; MacMullen). This period witnessed the creation of a Christian literary culture able to reach a diverse social and educational spectrum (Auerbach: 25-82; also see Rousseau; on John Chrysostom, see Mayer 1998, 1999).

Yet, one must ask if the degree of literacy – both the ability to read and the inclination to read – was found in equal proportions among pagans and Christians. Other writers have noted that literacy was highly prized among the Christian communities. Averil Cameron states: “the Christian communities had an impulse toward literacy and reading that was generally lacking in pagan culture, and thus . . . the growth of Christianity as a system brought with it a changed attitude toward texts. Christianity early became a religion of books” (109; of course, one must also acknowledge that Judaism was a religion of the book).

Since Christianity is a religion of the Book and of books, education proliferated in the church as it did in the synagogue to a degree far greater than anything found in pagan society. Hence popular thought among the Christians cannot be so easily and uniformly be compared to popular thought in paganism. Christianity’s use of and attachment to written texts was in a sense counter-cultural. This was profoundly unlike any attitude or practice found in pagan

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<sup>14</sup> *Aliquas sane earundem quaestionum popularibus ecclesiasticis sermonibus solui.* Also see Brown: 457-58.

culture at the end of the fourth century; written texts, especially the scriptures, were available to all (see Cameron: 89-119, esp. 109-11). They were not the possession of an elite group.

While the rate of illiteracy was surely high, this assessment does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that audiences could barely understand their rhetor's eloquent words (see Harris: 3-24). Rather we should understand illiteracy as a condition for understanding how they learned. One's level of understanding can be tied to the ability to read; but there is no necessary connection. The fact of illiteracy offers us relatively little information. It tells us how they learned, not what they learned.

The Roman world certainly adopted and used writing extensively, yet it largely retained the features of an oral society, including the significant place given to memorization (see Harris: 175-284). Further, modern scholarly discussions focus largely on the formal and neglect the informal aspects of education. But surely the weekly and even daily training given to individuals in the congregation, the homily, combined with the more extensive information offered in catechesis, should not be ignored (see Harmless). The Christian populace had access to books in a form wholly extraordinary to pagan experience. In addition to concentrated teaching, the practice of reading aloud provided access to the texts. Certainly, the readings of the text by the *lector* should not be considered insignificant. Nor should we neglect other forms of information and teaching. In Augustine's Epistle 28\* we learn that he directed that the minutes from the Council of Carthage should be read to his congregation in Hippo. This practice argues for recognizing an extensive commitment to pedagogy of the populace. Not only did this mirror the practice in Carthage; Augustine's own analysis of the Council was read aloud as well.<sup>15</sup> Such instruction along with homilies, were a critical form of public pedagogy, and we should make the fullest possible use of these materials to assess late antique theology.

Moreover, this form of access was not unconscious and tenuous, but contemplated and commented upon. In his exposition of Psalm 121, Augustine says, "Who indeed is Israel? The meaning of this name has already been stated, and let it be recited often; for perhaps, though it has been stated even recently, it has escaped you. By reciting it, let us make it so that it may not escape from those who have been unable or unwilling to read. Let us be their book" (*En. Ps.* 121.8; author's translation).<sup>16</sup> Less direct, yet affirming the same attitude, is the statement found in the exposition of Psalm 103 that comments on life in the heavenly Jerusalem: "There we shall neither need to have a book read, nor to have a sermon preached . . . the Word of

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Eno in his introduction to Letter 28\* (the asterisk refers to those Augustine's letters discovered by Divjak and enumerated separately from the main series of letters) suggests that the *Breviculus collationis*, Augustine's summary, was read rather than the actual minutes due to the length, and that a reading of his *Ad Donatistas post collationem* would then follow (187).

<sup>16</sup> *Quid est enim Israel? Interpretatio nominis eius dicta est iam, et saepe dicatur; forte enim etsi recens dicta est, excidit. Dicendo nos faciamus ut non escidat etiam eis qui legere non noverunt aut noluerunt; nos simus codex ipsorum.* Readers should note that the Latin translations of the Psalms (including the old North African translation that Augustine used as well as Jerome's Vulgate) followed the structure of the Septuagint. It uses a different system of enumerating the Psalms in which Psalms 9 and 10 are conflated and Psalm 147 is split in two.

God will be present but not by letters, sounds, books, readers or preachers” (*En. Ps.* 103.3.3).<sup>17</sup> Books, lectors, and expositors – here we find Augustine’s understanding of the primary forms of access to the written word (more particularly, the Bible) for the ordinary populace. This was tantamount to pedagogy in late antiquity and Augustine recognized this as such; he likened these forms of access to the educational structures elsewhere calling the churches the “sacred lecture halls for the people” (*Ep.* 91.3).<sup>18</sup> We should not be surprised, then, to find that Augustine’s preaching reflected both his theological concerns and included a substantial amount of speculative enquiry (Mohrmann: 402).

### Forming Matters: the Cosmological Foundation to an Idea

Cosmology, the metaphysical speculation about the nature of the created order, is central to Augustine’s theological speculations. It is so fundamental that it arguably touches every part of his theological system, and no part of his theology can be reliably understood separate from it. For example, understanding Augustine’s view of the *saeculum* – the secular, intermediate state, existing as part of the created order, which is neither in itself sacred, identified with a specifically Christian status, nor profane, reflecting anti-christian or pagan institutions and *mores* – is obviously critical to understanding his political theology (see Markus 1988, 1994, 2006). Book 19 of *The City of God* cannot be understood until one has worked through the study of Genesis in the preceding books, beginning with Book 11. Likewise, his cosmology and interpretations of Genesis show up elsewhere, contributing to his theological anthropology. Hence, his many attempts to interpret Genesis should figure prominently in a study of his theology (Rosenberg 1998). This topic, then, carries significant ramifications for interpreting the nature of salvation and betokens the role of deification. It also suggests that ransom theory could never be more than a partially descriptive mechanism in his theological system. Space allows us to present only briefly the import of his cosmology, but the brevity is not a suggestion of its importance.

Augustine took keen and consistent interest in the opening chapters of Genesis: he certainly treated it as one of the most important texts in his canon. His interest plausibly goes back to the time of his conversion when he likely heard Ambrose’s sermons on the Hexameron; they could have both helped him resolve some of his earlier tensions about Christianity and offered the alternative to the Manichaean cosmology which he begun to doubt in the period preceding his move to Milan (see Burns 1990; Pourcelle: 98-103). The space he devoted over his career to interpreting the first part of Genesis composes a substantial portion of his corpus, which included offering his own cycle of sermons on Genesis (*S.* 229Q-V).<sup>19</sup> The number of times that Augustine marshals arguments from Genesis is striking. For

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<sup>17</sup> *quod codex ibi nobis legendus est, aut tractandus sermo, quemadmodum uobis modo tractatur. ideo modo tractatur, ut ibi teneatur; ideo modo per syllabas diuiditur, ut ibi totus atque integer contempletur. non ibi deerit uerbum dei; sed tamen non per litteras, non per sonos, non per codices, non per lectorem, non per tractatorem.*

<sup>18</sup> *hi autem mores in ecclesiis toto orbe crescentibus tamquam in sanctis auditoriis populorum.* See similar comments in *S.* 340A.4 and *Disc. chr.* 1.1.

<sup>19</sup> The tone, emphases, theology, and terminology suggest an early date, but these sermons are available only in extracts and lack internal evidence for dating. More broadly, dates for most of Augustine’s sermons are at best cautious approximations.

example, he cites Genesis 1:1 at least seven hundred times. He shows similar interest in other cosmological texts, citing the first chapter of John's Gospel some one thousand times.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in contrast to other Fathers like Jerome, Augustine rarely failed to take note of a cosmologically-oriented comment in a Psalm or other biblical passages. Attention to such matters spurs appreciation of how important this text was to him. Carpaccio's painting in Venice, *Visione di Sant' Agostino* (1502 CE), which presents Augustine with an armillary sphere, a closet full of astrolabes, a nocturnal and hourglass, and other instruments associated with both late antique and Renaissance science wonderfully represents this connection!

Augustine's interest in Genesis covers a span of at least thirty-seven years, from the beginning of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* around 389 CE to the completion of *De Civitate Dei* in 426 (which greatly assists us with tracking his intellectual evolution). One can detect in his explorations of Genesis an attempt to work out the implications of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, or rather, *facio ex nihilo* (and other variants; see *Gn. litt.* 7.21; 10.4; 10.9).<sup>21</sup> While this had obvious implications for his political theology, it also played a critical role in his understanding of signs, nature and the natural world, time, and the like. This development provided him not only with the intellectual vision of the desacralization of society and history (for which Markus argued) that enabled his response to the theological and apologetic crisis spawned by the sack of Rome by Gothic tribes in 410. It also offered a substantially different reading of the nature and value of the cosmos and the ability of the human mind to understand it.<sup>22</sup> As Peter Harrison has argued, this approach, together with Augustine's broader theological agenda as seen in his theological anthropology, played a crucial role in the development of the experimental method in early modern science.

Cosmology provides the substructure to wide swathes of Augustine's theology (see Burns 1976 more generally on the import of cosmology to the doctrine of salvation). Augustine posits a cosmology with a threefold structure (*Gn. litt.* 5.12.28). The pattern of creation existed first and foremost in the mind of the maker. The eternal and unchangeable ideas in the Word of God precede the work of creation; these are the blueprint (see *En. Ps.* 49.16). The accounts in Genesis begin with this second aspect of creation. Genesis 1 describes the creation of the underlying and enduring principles, which are spiritual and metaphysical realities; they are not material reality and so precede the physical creation. Hence, Augustine interprets Genesis 1 as speaking not of the actual creation of the phenomenal world, but of the causal reasons for creation – the *rationes incommutabiles*. These *rationes* inform the material creation. This creation was immediate, in which these *rationes* were created simultaneously, without any intervals of time. “One will ask how they were created originally on the sixth day. I shall reply: ‘Invisibly, potentially, in their causes, as things that will be in the future are made, yet not made in actuality now’” (*Gn. litt.* 6.6.10).<sup>23</sup> He describes this as the potential creation of the whole world; original

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<sup>20</sup> These figures do not include sermons and letters discovered since H. I. Marrou (83) offered these calculations.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine uses a variety of forms of the words. Translations of *De Genesi ad Litteram* are based (with some emendations) on the work of Taylor.

<sup>22</sup> Markus touched on this in arguing for the significance of Augustine's reflections on time in *Gn. litt.* as foundational to his later reflections on history in *De Civitate Dei* (1988: 11, 43; see Rosenberg 2010a).

<sup>23</sup> *invisibiliter, potentialiter, causaliter, quomodo fiunt futura non facta.*

purity can be found both in the archetype and in these intellectual *rationes*. Sin has not yet darkened the forms produced in intellectual creatures (*Gn. litt.* 2.8.17). The actual production of the physical world is the third aspect of creation and is represented in the second creation story of Genesis 2. At this stage comes the creation of the *rationes seminales*, the seminal reasons implanted in the world. These have physical properties and guide the continuing structure and development of the cosmos (*Gn. litt.* 6.5.8). Augustine typically uses the language of production to describe this third stage.

Augustine particularly stresses the locus of these forms in the Word of God, “in whom are the eternal reasons of all things made in time, existing in Him through whom all things have been created” (*Gn. litt.* 4.24.41).<sup>24</sup> The reason or form of the measure, number and weight of every creature exists within God (*Gn. litt.* 4.5.11-6.13). This refers to a favorite text, Wisdom 11.20: “He arranged all things by measure, number and weight” (*Gn. litt.* 4.5.12).<sup>25</sup> Hence, the archetypes are part and parcel with the divine activity and divine character. They have no separate existence or reality, and this gives the context for taking up the discussion of evil.

In *The Nature of the Good*, a work produced at about the same time Augustine began his extended literal commentary on Genesis, he uses this same key language for the creative activity of the divine to explain the nature of evil as the unmaking of existence: “Accordingly, were we asking from where evil comes, we should first be asking what evil is. It is nothing but the corruption to some degree of proper measure, form, or order of nature. What is called evil is in fact a corrupt nature. Were it incorrupt, the nature would be in every way good. But when corrupted, to the extent it exists according to its nature, it is good; to the extent it is corrupt, it is evil” (*Nat. b.* 4).<sup>26</sup> Noteworthy for Augustine, revolutionary even, is this notion that the corrupted thing retains some portion of goodness (see *Nat. b.* 6-10, 19). Sin vitiates nature but does not destroy it.<sup>27</sup> His understanding of conversion depends on this interpretation of nature (see Meconi: 15-27).

The implications of this cosmology for his understanding of redemption become particularly clear after addressing Augustine’s derivative argument for evil being a *privatio boni*. Critical here is understanding that Augustine, contrary to his Manichaean past, begins with a vibrant sense of the created order and its essential goodness as a product of divine activity both at its origin and to a degree (though vitiated to be sure) in its continuing operations. Meanwhile, one should note that cosmology shows up regularly in his preaching to the wider community; it is not a topic solely for the elite.

### Deforming and Reforming Matters: *Privatio Boni* and the Healing of the *Imago Dei*

The treatment of substance and nature as naturally good, and the degrading of goodness as a loss of substance, points to the major significance of privation theory for Augustine. While

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<sup>24</sup> *etiam quae temporaliter facta sunt, aeternae rationes, ramquam in eo, per quod facta sunt omnia, ac deinde in ipsa creatura.*

<sup>25</sup> *omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti.*

<sup>26</sup> *proinde cum quaeritur, unde sit malum, prius quaerendum est, quid sit malum. quod nihil aliud est quam corruption uel modi uel speciei uel ordinis naturalis. mala itaque natura dicitur, quae corrupta est; nam incorrupta utique bona est. sed etiam ipsa corrupta, in quantum natura est, bona est; in quantum corrupta est, mala est.*

<sup>27</sup> *Nat. b.* 28: *Qua naturaliter sunt. neque enim ex ipso sunt peccata, quae naturam non seruant, sed nitiant.*

Augustine does not use *privatio* or its derivatives in his sermons, other closely aligned terms appear, such as *corruptum* in its various forms. No discussion of Augustine's understanding of evil is complete without noting his focus on the problem of pride and its critical role in the downfall of spiritual creatures. He consistently argues, as in *De libero arbitrio* 3.17.47, that a perverted will is the cause of evil, and as a result of sin humans lost their original, natural state of being (*Lib. arb.* 3.17.51). "Vice, I began to say, is only evil because it is opposed to the nature of the thing which has the vice. Hence it is clear that the nature of this same thing whose vice is blamed is worthy of praise" (*Lib. arb.* 3.14.41).<sup>28</sup> Any imperfection spoils nature and diverges from its intended design; "if there is an imperfection that can be rightly blamed, it must be contrary to a thing's very nature" (*Lib. arb.* 3.13.38).<sup>29</sup> This, of course, reflects Augustine's highly teleological approach to the cosmos. We should expect this in his work. We should also expect the resolution of this problem to be likewise teleological in its approach and effect.

Since this is a standard bit of Augustinian thought that has been dealt with at length in other contexts, I need here only note the need to treat it as both a cause and a result of privation (see, e.g., Burns 1988). This notion is central to his theological anthropology, showing up throughout the works of the late 390s and the next decade. In Augustine's self-reflection, he describes it as crucial to his conversion, playing a key role in the *Confessions* where he depicts his quest to understand evil described in Books 5 to 7. There we see him coming to grips with the nature of substance as a created good and not something which is intrinsically or naturally evil (contrary to his Manichaean training). So this is not just a cosmological explanation; it is a deeply personal and intrinsic issue (see *Conf.* 7.12.18).

This approach becomes a hallmark of his thought, showing up throughout his career in diverse crucial works that incorporate it as a key theological reflection; these include, for example:

- *De doctrina christiana*, where privation and corruption are an inherent problem shaping his semiotic theory and the hermeneutical challenges that humans face;
- *De Genesi ad litteram*, where he tracks the impact of corruption on nature, and this approach enables him to establish an understanding of the physical world, the *saeculum*, and the devolution of human nature that is contingent, conflicted, and yet good, which in turn sets up his political theology in *De civitate Dei*;
- *De libero arbitrio* (started early in his career, but completed later), where the concept has significant implications for his understanding of freedom and free will.

The notion is also incorporated into his anti-Pelagian works. Since privation theory provides a critical path toward Augustine's understanding of *deificatio*, arguably it should not be present here since these works are taken especially to represent atonement as a result of ransom; these are the touchstone for the old model's doctrine of atonement.

And yet, in his work on *Nature and Grace*, Augustine argued that corrupted nature (*natura vitiosa*) came from the original pair's volitional act that both harmed them and burdened all

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<sup>28</sup> *vitium autem, ut dicere coeperam, non aliunde malum est nisi quia naturae adversatur eius ipsius rei cuius est vitium.*

<sup>29</sup> *si autem quia nocet ideo vitium est, ideo vitium est quia contra naturam est.*

who come from them. In human history, this original act of privation established the sort of fault it was, and hence determined the kind of repair work that would be necessary to correct the fault. This defined Augustine's understanding of the nature of salvation. The originate pair's altered nature was handed on to subsequent generations (*Nat. et gr.* 3.3). Into this deformed state, the physician stepped in to provide healing (*Nat. et gr.* 30.34).<sup>30</sup> This is all well-trodden ground, and the point here is not to reiterate Augustine's anti-Pelagian arguments. Rather, the point is that a simple notion of ransom is insufficient to explain the nature and process of healing that Augustine envisioned. For this sort of healing, the divine healer provided an infusion of his own righteousness into the soul of the corrupted person. The vitiated nature had to be reinvigorated, and such a revivifying required a greater intervention and infusion of grace than ransom theory allows; a gift of righteousness that infuses the person, revivifying that person and healing the dramatic effects of the *privatio boni* (*Nat. et gr.* 56.59; Karfikova: 187-91).

This position is a constant from the 390s to the last few years of his life; it strikingly shows up in the closest thing to a complete overview of Augustinian thought, the *Enchiridion*. In an early section of that work that signals the foundational importance of this notion, Book 3 provides a synthetic presentation of privation that describes evil as the removal of good.

(10) By this Trinity, supremely, equally, and unchangeably good, all things have been created: they are not supremely, equally, or unchangeably good, but even when they are considered individually, each one of them is good; and at the same time all things are very good, since in all these things consists the wonderful beauty of the universe.

(11) In this universe even that which is called evil, well ordered and kept in its place, sets the good in higher relief, so that good things are more pleasing and praiseworthy than evil ones. Nor would Almighty God, "to whom," as even the pagans confess, "belongs supreme power" [Virgil, *Aeneid* X,100], since he is supremely good, in any way allow anything evil to exist among his works were he not so omnipotent and good that he can bring good even out of evil. For what else is that which is called evil but a removal of good? In the bodies of animals, to be afflicted with diseases and wounds is nothing other than to be deprived of health: the aim of treatment is not to make the evils which were in the body, such as diseases and wounds, move from where they were to somewhere else, but rather that they should cease to exist, since a wound or a disease is not in itself a substance but a defect in the substance of flesh. The flesh itself is the substance, a good thing to which those evil things, those removals of the good, known as health, occur. In the same way all evils that affect the mind are removals of natural goods: when they are cured they are not moved to somewhere else, but, when they are no longer in the mind once

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<sup>30</sup> Note the extensive use of medical imagery in Augustine's work vis-à-vis salvation and its centrality in the *Confessions*. This is a clue that ransom theory alone does not reflect the whole of his position (see Arbesmann; Griffith).

it has been restored to health, they will be nowhere (*Ench.* 3.10-11; Hill et al.: 40-41).<sup>31</sup>

Health is the restoration of the right nature countering the impact of defect.

### Formative Teaching: Corruption and Deification in Sermons

Turning to his sermons, we find that Augustine draws upon this same sense of privation to explain the nature of corruption and deformation inherent to the human condition. It was a central motif both in his own understanding and in his presentations to congregations on the nature of brokenness. *Sermo* 90A in this way is emblematic of his work. He teaches the congregation that the ills and troubles and future death they all face are a form of decay for which the gift of salvation provides healing, restoring the good lost to the effects of sin and death: “It continues . . . once our ills are healed: *Who redeems your life from decay?* This now happens in the resurrection of the dead. And what follows the redemption of our life from decay? . . . So with our sins forgiven, our ills healed, our life redeemed from decay, our crowns bestowed on us by His mercy, what shall we be doing, what shall we have?” (*S.* 90A.14).<sup>32</sup>

The ideas incorporated or implied in the idea of atonement are addressed in many of his doctrinal works. However, the sermons provide a particularly vibrant and important set of texts. Though comments from the pulpit include the notion of ransom (e.g., *S.* 27.2; 86.7; also note *Io. eu. tr.* 41.4), a further, critical component of Augustine’s understanding of redemption is evident: the refashioning of our nature. This component is a regular focus in his comments on Christ’s act of ransoming humans. In many cases his discussion of ransom serves as a stepping-stone to this end. Witness his comments in *Sermo* 86: “He must have held you very dear, since he bought you so dearly. You acknowledge the one who bought you; observe what he bought you back from” (*S.* 86.7). Ransom theory stands out in many sermons; but again, it is not the whole of his concern. *Sermo* 27, which perhaps dates to ca. 418 and so during his debate with the Pelagians, is a particularly apt example: “From the first transgression of the first man, the whole human race, being born in the shackles of sin, was the property of the devil who had conquered it. After all, if we hadn’t been held in captivity, we wouldn’t have needed a redeemer. . . . So he came to the captives not having been captured himself. He came to redeem the captives, having in himself not a trace of the captivity, that is to say, of iniquity,

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<sup>31</sup> (10) *ab hac summe et aequaliter et immutabiliter bona trinitate creata sunt omnia, nec summe nec aequaliter nec immutabiliter bona, sed tamen bona etiam singula: simul uero uniuersa ualde bona, quia ex omnibus consistit uniuersitatis admirabilis pulchritudo.*

(11) *in qua etiam illud quod malum dicitur, bene ordinatum et loco suo positum, eminentius commendat bona, ut magis placeant et laudabiliora sint dum comparantur malis. Neque enim deus omnipotens – quod etiam infideles fatentur: «rerum cui summa potestas» – cum summe bonus sit, ullo modo sineret mali esse aliquid in operibus suis nisi usque adeo esset omnipotens et bonus ut bene faceret et de malo. quid est autem aliud quod malum dicitur, nisi priuatio boni? nam sicut corporibus animalium nihil est aliud morbis et uulneribus quam sanitate priuari – neque enim id agitur cum adhibetur curatio, ut mala ista quae inerant, id est morbi ac uulnera, recedant hinc et alibi sint, sed utique ut non sint; non enim ulla substantia, sed carnalis substantiae uitium est uulnus aut morbus, cum caro sit ipsa substantia, profecto aliquod bonum cui accidunt ista mala, id est priuationes eius boni quod dicitur sanitas – ita et animorum quaecumque sunt uitia naturalium sunt priuationes bonorum, quae cum sanantur non aliquo transferuntur, sed ea quae ibi erant nusquam erunt quando in illa sanitate non erunt.*

<sup>32</sup> *Iudicium enim sine misericordia illi qui non fecit misericordiam. Dimissis ergo peccatis, sanatis languoribus, redempta de corruptione uita nostra, reddita nobis in eius misericordia corona nostra, quid agemus, quid habebimus? Qui satiat in bonis, non malis.*

but bringing the price for us in his mortal flesh” (S. 27.2).<sup>33</sup> On the face of it, this is a classic example of ransom theory. And in fact it is, but not in the way we have come to read it. It would be a mistake to treat these words in isolation. The point of these reflections is found just a bit further on in the same sermon where he turns to the question of the reason behind the Savior’s actions. Citing Isaiah 53, Augustine says, “Christ’s deformity is what gives form to you. If he had been unwilling to be deformed, you would never have got back the form you lost. So he hung on the cross, deformed; but his deformity was our beauty” (S. 27.6).<sup>34</sup> In another sermon we find Augustine commenting that “the law of charity is the law of Christ. He came because he loved us; not that he may be loved, but by his love he might make us loveable” (S. 163B).<sup>35</sup>

By defining the doctrine by a narrow study of the dogmatic formulation, we place ourselves in the unenviable but common position of misreading the texts. Augustine was, after all, a rhetorician of particular note and merit. Fluidity and literary craftsmanship were a staple of his preaching. Augustine attempted to move his audience toward a particular vision and goal. To take too close an examination of a particular section of the text leading up to the goal is tantamount to misrepresentation. Ransom theory was a tool for Augustine, important as an explanation of the means, but rather limited, as he was primarily concerned with the ends.

In doing this, Augustine attempted to lead his listener to a fuller vision of God and practice of life as one renewed by God. He, like Irenaeus and Athanasius before him, argued that there is a profound and necessary connection between the means of renewal, the origins of the cosmos, and its fulfilment (Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4.33.4; Athanasius, *De incarnatio* 54.3).<sup>36</sup> The gift of renewal comes only from the creator of life. In one of the *Tractates on John’s Gospel*, he says, “Christ is the former and reformer of humans, the creator and recreator, the maker and remaker” (*Io. eu. tr.* 38.8).<sup>37</sup> His is a work of restoration, a work that Christ is uniquely able to perform because the Son is the agent of creation. Augustine regularly emphasizes that Christ’s deformity on the cross is the means by which the creation is restored, recovering the form lost by sin. This assessment follows from Augustine’s use of privation theory to explain the origin and nature of evil. In his rejection of Manichaean thought, Augustine had turned to privation theory to answer his most pressing questions on the problem of evil. In this theory he found a means to maintain God’s goodness in the face of horrific evil by positing real change in the ontological and moral structure of the creation through the free choice of the will. Augustine’s use of privation theory has led some to believe that Augustine thought evil to be illusory. This is a complete misunderstanding of his position,

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<sup>33</sup> *uniuersum genus humanum natum cum obligatione peccati uictor diabolus possidebat. si enim sub captiuitate non teneremur, redemptore non indigeremus. uenit ad captiuos non captus. uenit ad captiuos redimendos nihil in se captiuitatis, hoc est, iniquitatis habens, sed carne mortali pretium nostrum portans.*

<sup>34</sup> *deformitas christi te format. ille enim si deformis esse noluisset, tu formam quam perdidisti non recepisses. pendebat ergo in cruce deformis: deformitas illius pulchritudo nostra erat.*

<sup>35</sup> *ipsa est enim lex Christi; lex caritatis est lex Christi. ideo uenit, quia nos amauit; et non erat quod amaret, sed amando amabiles fecit.*

<sup>36</sup> This is not to argue that Augustine knew their works directly, but the implication is tantalizing.

<sup>37</sup> *hominis formator et reformatore, creator et recreator, factor et refactor.*

however. For Augustine, privation theory meant that creatures are twisted away from their pure original structure, purpose and practice. Hence evil, though specifically thought of as a privation of goodness, is both expressed and experienced by real, concrete individuals. Far from illusory, it is profoundly present in creation, afflicting all creatures (cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 10.13; 13.10; 102.5; *En. Ps.* 44.3).

The atonement provides for the resolution and the healing of original sin. In light of later formulations of the doctrine, it is critical to be clear here that Augustine treats original sin as causing a defect or privation in the actual nature of humanity. Humans are not found in Adam and Eve in some merely representative fashion; there is no notion of federal headship. Rather, original sin indicates that their choice in the garden marred and profoundly altered human nature (on privation theory, see Burns 1988; Cress). The nature given to the children of the first parents is a mutated corruption of the original. Hence humans require healing and restoration to God's original design (or actually something even better, Augustine thought, since the cross offered a superior form of grace that was neither known nor experienced by Adam and Eve). Even more, reconciliation is a work of wonder and delight. In one place he pictures a penitent who has sold himself out for the sake of a brief pleasure. "I he says, 'have been twisted under the weight of iniquity, but your word is the set-square of truth. So straighten me out, twists and all, as though in line with a set-square, that is to say with your straight word. So *direct my steps according to your word, and let no iniquity master me. I have sold myself; you, please redeem me. I have sold myself by my own choice; redeem me by your own blood*'" (*S.* 30.2).<sup>38</sup> This neatly captures the imagery of corruption and redemption as restoration.

Augustine's wonder at the work of reconciliation is an oft-repeated theme. An *enarratio* on Psalm 32 states that the soul is the highest thing next to God, yet it is defiled by sin. Hence, Christ, who first of all fashioned the soul, came to refashion it (*En. Ps.* 32.3.16, on verse 12). He often uses the analogy of the minting and refashioning of coinage to explain this process.<sup>39</sup> This telling analogy recalls imperial politics and rhetoric: a new emperor would reclaim coins minted under previous rulers and have them restruck with his image. Similarly, Augustine believed, the work of the Savior leads to a profound refashioning of human nature, and claims it for new use based on a reforming of the object. This begins the eradication of corruption

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<sup>38</sup> *ego, inquit, distortus sum sub pondere iniquitatis, sed uerbum tuum est regula ueritatis: me ergo a me distortum corrige tanquam ad regulam, hoc est, ad uerbum rectum. dirige ergo gressus meos secundum uerbum tuum, et ne dominetur mihi omnis iniquitas. uendidi me, redime me. uendidi me, arbitrio meo, redime me sanguine tuo.*

<sup>39</sup> See for example *Io. eu. tr.* 40.9.2. In *En. Ps.* 4.8, Augustine states, "Therefore in a quite wonderful and yet concise way the psalmist shows to those who see within, the good things which are to be sought. By way of reply to the questioning of those who say, *Who has anything good to show us?* the psalmist says, *The light of your countenance is stamped upon us, O Lord.* This light is the complete and true good of humankind; it is seen not with the eyes but with the mind. The psalmist's phrase, *stamped upon us*, suggests a coin stamped with the king's picture. For the human individual has been made in God's image and likeness, something which each has corrupted by sinning. Therefore true and eternal goodness is ours if we are minted afresh by being born again. (*homo enim factus est ad imaginem et similitudinem dei, quam peccando corrupit; bonum ergo eius est uerum atque aeternum, si renascendo signetur.*) And I believe that our Lord's exhortation when he saw Caesar's coin, *Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*, refers to this, as some have aptly understood it. It is as if Christ said: "Just as Caesar demands from you the mark of his likeness, so too does God; and just as money is rendered to Caesar, by the same principle the soul is rendered to God, illuminated and marked by the light of his face" (Boulding: III/15, 89-90).

(*Nat. et gr.* 40 [47]). “Let the good soul be praised in the Lord, since it is his possessing it that makes it good, his breathing life into it that makes it flourish, his enlightening it that makes it shine, his forming and shaping it that makes it beautiful, his filling that makes it fruitful. It was through his abandoning it to its own devices, you see, that it was once tossing about dead, dark, deformed, and barren, before it had come to believe in Christ” (*S.* 312.2).<sup>40</sup> Formation, deformation, and reformation – these three terms set in apposition encapsulate his understanding of the process (see the classic study of Ladner). This hallmark of his thinking would be a driving force in his preaching. It would also be a touchstone in the doctrinal battles with Donatists and their sacramental perfectionism and with Pelagians and their emphasis on individual perfection.

### Conforming Spirituality: Deification *and* Participation in the Divine Life

We should recall what Augustine means by *imago et similitudo*: he emphasizes being made “to” the image: a likeness or similitude (see Karfikova: 240-42). Bearing in mind *De trinitate* 14, where he describes the corrupt human being renewed after the mind has turned to God (*Trin.* 14.12.15; 14.14.18), we see that such language emphasizes the notion of participating in God. As mentioned above, restriking coins with a new imperial image portrays Augustine’s understanding of this process. The raw materials remain, even if still marred by the image of a prior ruler. They retain some utility but have to be reissued with a new image in order to serve properly as representatives within the imperially-controlled economy. So too the human being is given the new image to bear as a part of his or her own features. Augustine teases out this notion in many sermons, as in his exposition of Psalm 94:

If, therefore, we move away from God by being unlike him, we also approach him by likeness to him. What sort of likeness is this? It is the likeness to God in which we were created, which we had spoiled by sin, which we receive afresh when our sins are forgiven, which is renewed in us inwardly, in our minds. Thus the image of our God is engraved anew on his coin, which is our soul, so that we may return to his coffers. Why did our Lord Jesus Christ choose a coin to demonstrate to his challengers what God seeks in us, brothers and sisters?<sup>41</sup> Why a coin? They were seeking some ground of accusation against him, and they decided to consult the teacher of truth about the tribute exacted by Caesar: they wished to ask him whether it was lawful to pay this tax. And what did he say? *Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?* Then he asked for a coin, and one was brought. *Whose image does it bear?* he demanded. They replied, *Caesar’s*, and he took them up on that: *Then render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s* (Mt 22:18.20-21). This was his way of saying,

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<sup>40</sup> *in Domino laudetur anima bona, quo possidente fit bona, quo inspirante viget, quo illuminante fulget, quo formante pulchra, quo implente fecunda est. Hoc enim deserente, quondam mortua, tenebrosa, deformis, sterilis fluctuabat, antequam credidisset in Christum.*

<sup>41</sup> *ergo si dissimilitudine recedimus a deo, similitudine accedimus ad deum. qua similitudine? ad quam facti sumus, quam in nobis peccando corruperamus, quam peccatorum remissione recepimus, quae in nobis renouatur intus in mente, ut tamquam resculpatur in nummo, idest, in anima nostra imago dei nostri, et redeamus ad thesaurus eius. nam unde, fratres, de nummo uoluit dominus noster iesus christus ostendere tentatoribus suis quid quaerat deus?*

“If Caesar claims his own image in this coin, does not God likewise claim his image in human beings”?

Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ invites us to live in harmony with our likeness to God when he commands us to love even our enemies, for he presents God himself as our model: you are to be *like your Father in heaven*, he says, *who causes his sun to rise over the good and the wicked, and sends rain upon the just and unjust alike. Be perfect, like your Father in heaven* (Mt 5:45.48). By saying, *Be perfect, like your Father in heaven*, he invites us to make the likeness real. But if he needs to invite us to it, we must conclude that by becoming unlike God we had distanced ourselves from him. We had gone far away in our loss of likeness, but we are brought near by being like him, so that the scriptural word may be verified in us: *Draw near to God, and receive his light*.

When our psalm says, *Come, let us rejoice exceedingly to the Lord*, it is addressing people who have taken up a position far from the Lord and are leading bad lives. “Where are you going? What hiding place are you looking for? Where are you off to? Where do you think to escape, by rejoicing with this world? *Come, let us rejoice exceedingly to the Lord*. Why seek your enjoyment in a place where you will certainly come to grief? Come on, let us exult rather in him by whom we were created.” *Come, let us rejoice exceedingly to the Lord* (*En. Ps.* 94.2; Boulding: III/19, 410-11).

Such statements provide a counterweight to those who posit that the teaching of deification is absent, or quixotic, or unimportant in Augustine’s works, since the terms *deificari* and *deificatio* show up only a handful of times. To pass judgment based on Augustine’s use of the term alone sets out a false metric that misses many other uses of cognate concepts to convey the same meaning. These include the numerous discussions of the evil representing the decay or corruption of human nature – *factus est in imago et similitudino* – and the subsequent restoration of this nature in Christ through whom God remade humans in his image and likeness. It also misses the force of the argument in the *Confessions* that turns on this sort of transformation and often uses the language of healing. It misses the central role that *privatio boni* plays as a building block in Augustine’s theological system and the dynamic and synthetic connection made by *deificari in otio* in response to such a fundamental issue as the problem of evil. Perhaps, too, such a view evidences a preoccupation with Augustine’s treatises to the exclusion of the sermons.

In the tenth of the *Tractates on John*, perhaps dating from the second decade of the fifth century, Augustine’s treatment of John 2:12-21 begins this way: “Here is the Lord, our God, the Word of God, the Word made flesh, the Son of the Father, the Son of God, the Son of man, exalted that he might create us, humbled that he might re-create us, walking among men, suffering what is human, concealing what is divine” (*Io. eu. tr.* 10.1).<sup>42</sup> Herein is a profound vision of the nature of redemption. It is a vision that leads further on, for the sermon concludes: “Let every sigh be a panting after Christ. Let that most beautiful one, who loved

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<sup>42</sup> *hic dominus deus noster uerbum dei, uerbum caro factum, filius patris, filius dei, filius hominis, excelsus ut nos faceret, humilis ut nos reficeret, ambulans inter homines, patiens humana, abscondens divina.*

even the ugly that he might make them beautiful, let him be longed for. Hurry to him alone, sigh for him” (*Io. eu. tr.* 10.13).<sup>43</sup> Christ became deformed that his creation might become beautiful (*S.* 27.6).<sup>44</sup> God’s love aims at creating beauty in place of deformity (*Ep. Io. tr.* 9.9).

Augustine held that this reformation and the formation of beauty by a beautiful Creator would refashion the creature both ontologically and morally. Reshaping these would renew the deep connection between God and his creation. He comments on this in a manner reminiscent of the notion of deification usually associated with the Greek Fathers: “In order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human; without forfeiting what he was, he wished to become what he himself had made. He himself made what he would become, because what he did was add man to God, not lose God in man” (*S.* 192.1.1).<sup>45</sup> Though Augustine of course did not hold that humans become God in their nature, he did believe that participation provides for the renewal of the proper created nature; this enables humans to become like unto God morally, and to enter into the divine life relationally. This is a cornerstone of Augustinian spirituality. Elsewhere he describes it as an invitation to participate in the divine life: “the Teacher of humility became a sharer in our infirmity to enable us to share in his divinity; he came down to us both to teach us the way and to become the way, and he graciously willed to make his own humility above all a lesson to us” (*En. Ps.* 58.1.7; see *En. Ps.* 32.3.18; *Ep.* 91; *Trin.* 4.2).<sup>46</sup> “To share in his divinity” is an authentically Augustinian notion. Chadwick (247) was right to describe participation in the divine life as central to Augustine’s understanding of redemption. Augustine’s focus on participation in the divine life stands as a centerpiece of this pastoral agenda. Though it can be found in a few critical texts among his dogmatic writings, it is not always so apparent.

Hence, when one takes into account his sermons, the mention of deification in *The City of God* above is not so surprising. Augustine understands the Mediator as

a good intermediary who reconciles enemies . . . [who] are made blessed by participation in the one God. . . . And that Mediator in whom we can participate, and by participation reach our happiness, is the uncreated Word of God, by whom all things were created. And yet He is not the Mediator in that He is the Word, for the Word, being pre-eminently immortal and blessed, is far removed from wretched mortals. He is the Mediator in that He is man, by His very manhood making it plain that for the attainment of that good, which is not only blessed but beatific also, we have not to look for other mediators, through whom, as we may think, we can achieve the approach to happiness. God Himself, the blessed God, who is the giver of blessedness, became

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<sup>43</sup> *omnia suspiria christo inbelent. ille unus pulcherrimus, qui et foedos dilexit ut pulchros faceret, desideretur; ad illum unum curratur, illi ingemiscatur.*

<sup>44</sup> *deformitas illius pulchritudo nostra erat.*

<sup>45</sup> *deos facturus qui homines erant, homo factus est qui Deus erat: nec amittens quod erat, fieri voluit ipse quod fecerat. Ipse fecit quod esset, quia hominem Deo addidit, non Deum in homine perdidit* (I am indebted to Bonner).

<sup>46</sup> *doctor autem humilitatis, particeps nostrae infirmitatis, donans participationem suae divinitatis, ad hoc descendens ut viam doceret et via fieret, maxime suam humilitatem nobis commendare dignatus est.*

partaker of our human nature, and thus offered us a short cut to participation in His own divine nature (*Civ.* 9.15; Bettenson: 361 [adjusted]).<sup>47</sup>

The appearance of deification should neither surprise us nor be thought an aberration. Its regular appearance in Augustine's sermons is common enough to warrant treating it as representative of his thought; it builds on his cosmological vision and assumes his understanding of evil as a *privatio boni*. Indeed, other statements implying deification in Augustine cannot be understood apart from this pastoral context and these theological commitments.

Far from being alien to Augustine's thought or surprising to discover, teaching on deification should be a recurring theme when the sermons are included while reading Augustine's works. And it is. Indeed, read in this way, one differently approaches key works such as *Confessions* and *De trinitate*, allowing their arguments to unfold in new ways that shed fresh light on how Augustine understands redemption, along with other related theological positions. Hence, we can also reform our prior approach to these masterpieces of theological introspection and reflection.

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<sup>47</sup> *qui reconciliat inimicos. et ideo multi sunt medii separatores, quia multitudo, quae beata est, unius dei participatione fit beata . . . sed uno mediatore opus erat, et hoc eo ipso, cuius participationem simul beati, hoc est uerbo dei non facto, per quod facta sunt omnia. nec tamen ob hoc mediator est, quia uerbum; maxime quippe immortale et maxime beatum uerbum longe est a mortalibus miseris; sed mediator, per quod homo, eo ipso utique ostendens ad illud non solum beatum, uerum etiam beatificum bonum non oportere quaeri alios mediatores, per quos arbitremur nobis peruenitionis gradus esse moliendos, quia beatus et beatificus deus factus particeps humanitatis nostrae compendium praebuit participandae diuinitatis suae.*

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