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14. Orthodox Perspectives on Saint Augustine

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Abstract

It is not unusual in Orthodox circles to hear Augustine of Hippo mentioned in polemical if not pejorative terms – that is, if discussed at all. Until very recently, the prevailing general narrative in modern times is that Augustine was linguistically and culturally confined to a rapidly deteriorating *Romanitas*, and that his theology – and by extension his anthropology – was at odds with pristine Orthodoxy, and would have been rejected had it been known. Such attitudes rely upon, and in turn have contributed to, the perception of a cultural and theological chasm dividing Greek East and Latin West that has prevailed in Orthodox scholarship since the twentieth century. This paper critiques these persistent negative perspectives on Augustine by focusing on some of the persons, factors, and motivations behind them. It argues that residual negative attitudes about Augustine arose largely as a result of the late modern reassessment of Orthodox self-identity that exaggerates theological differences at the expense of catholicity. Finally, it calls attention to recent efforts among some Orthodox scholars to restore balance in assessing Augustine’s rightful place in Orthodox tradition.

Keywords: Augustine, Cappadocian, Eastern Orthodox, Trinity

Introduction

Apart from a few recent exceptions,¹ over the past century Orthodox centers of learning, both here and abroad, have accorded very little attention to Augustine and his writings. When he is discussed, it is rarely on the merits of his own theological convictions, but on the basis of how his theology conflicts with some exaggerated estimate of Eastern patristic consensus. His writings, especially on the Trinity, are often set in direct opposition to eastern patristic, especially Cappadocian, texts. It is further held that Augustine's misinformed and erroneous doctrine of the Trinity generated serious problems for Western anthropology and ecclesiology. For some, like Yannaris (1971) and Azkoul (1986), the deep personal introspection laid bare in the *Confessions* became the harbinger of the West's characteristic pre-occupation with the individual self and ultimately with atheism, nihilism, and the death of God. These negative views of Augustine are often set within a larger context of Orthodox identity polemics against the West that one finds to varying degrees in the works of twentieth-century Orthodox luminaries such as Georges Florovsky (Gallaher), John Zizioulas (Cohen), Christos Yannaris (1971), and others. For some modern Orthodox intellectuals, and many of their students as a result, the bishop of Hippo remains at best a tarnished star in the constellation of patristic luminaries, at worst a heretic ultimately responsible for spawning every misguided theology and godless philosophy the West has ever known.²

As the product of an Orthodox theological education, I am clearly this volume's least qualified contributor to address matters Augustinian, so I will not even try. I can say that after many stimulating discussions with our dear friend, Fr. Bill Harmless (memory eternal), and having read his *Augustine in His Own Words*, and especially now having participated in this symposium, I have become keenly aware of the fact that the portrait of Augustine that we Orthodox students and seminarians acquired from our esteemed professors was grossly distorted. This admission becomes somewhat less embarrassing in light of the fact that the latest generation of non-Orthodox Augustinian scholars appears to be undergoing a similar reorientation. The major difference is that for us the traditional picture of Augustine served as a kind of straw man, a foil for bolstering our own Eastern Orthodox self-identity, so that now the picture of Augustine (within the larger context of the relationship of East and West) must be critically reassessed. Toward that end, it might be of some value to critique some of the ways Augustine has been regarded by Eastern Orthodox Christians, to surmise reasons that may underlie some of the more negative evaluations, and to bring to light efforts and

¹ Notable exceptions to this situation include the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University (see Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008). In June 2007 a conference of "eastern" and "western" Christian scholars assembled there for the purpose of reexamining longstanding points of contention between their respective Greek and Latin traditions on Augustine and his writings. More on this below. Several graduate student conferences held recently at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, in Brookline, MA, have also contributed to a reevaluation of Augustine among the Orthodox.

² Examples of the more extreme perspective may be found in Yannaris (1971, 1975) and Azkoul (1991). Yannaris refers to Augustine as "the fount of every distortion and alteration in the Church's truth in the West" (1984: 151).

avenues that might lead to reaffirming Augustine's rightful place as one of the holy fathers of Orthodoxy among the Orthodox themselves.

Augustine in the East Roman Empire

Although the influence of Augustine's writings upon Western culture cannot be overstated, it is a commonplace that he was not well known among Greek-speaking Romans. However, the dearth of written evidence does not exclude the possibility that he was the subject of theological discussions going on in Alexandria. An examination of Augustine's surviving correspondence with Cyril of Alexandria concerning Jerome's energetic efforts toward bringing about an ecumenical condemnation of all things Pelagian, in light of the close correspondence that Rome had established with Alexandria well before Augustine's time, supports the assertion that Augustine's writings were not wholly confined to the West (Ayles 2004, 2010). Furthermore, Augustine's Epistle 4* alerts Cyril to the presence of Latin speakers in Alexandria, warning him to beware any who may be spreading the teachings of Pelagius (Eno: 40). We may conclude, therefore, that Augustine was not completely unknown in that Eastern patriarchate, although it was more by dint of his reputation as a vigorous defender of orthodoxy than knowledge of his theological writings. In any case, the assertion of John Romanides (64) that Augustine was "simply ignored" by Greek-speaking Romans seems overblown.

Toward the end of his life, Augustine's tireless efforts against Pelagianism managed to catch the attention of Constantinople. Emperor Theodosios II formally invited the bishop to attend the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), which, in addition to addressing the well-known christological controversies raging between Cyril and Nestorius, would seek to resolve the Pelagian problem.³ Sadly, Augustine died before receiving this invitation, and thus was deprived of enjoying the fruits of final victory. However, his fervent crusade to secure the condemnation of Pelagianism in defense of orthodoxy solidified his place among the celebrated fathers of the Church, as evidenced by his inclusion in the documents of subsequent synods.

Justinian's letter inaugurating the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II, 553), mentions Augustine alongside Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, both Gregories, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Leo of Rome. The *acta* of the council state that certain letters of Augustine were read aloud by a North African delegate during the fifth session. Snippets from Augustine's florilegia are also included in the document (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 12-13). So again, it appears that Augustine's name and reputation – and not so much the primary currents of his thought – served ecclesiastical and imperial interests in promoting and maintaining catholicity. With little knowledge of the content of Augustine's teachings, admitting him to such company appears to have been based on a combination of his reputation as a zealous defender of orthodoxy and the fact that including him bolstered

³ Pelagius had already been declared a heretic by the Council of Carthage (418), but this was after being absolved of all heresy at a small council in Lydda/Diospolis, Palestine, three years earlier (415). Augustine is not mentioned by name in the *acta* of the Ephesus council, but there the condemnations against Pelagianism were ratified and Caelestius was condemned.

shared ecclesiastical and imperial interests in maintaining catholicity across eastern and western ends of the empire.

Augustine's name and reputation endures as well in the proceedings of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 680-81), but there is still precious little evidence that any of his major works were known.⁴ It is significant that the *acta* of this synod refer to Augustine as the "blessed Augustine, a most illustrious doctor" for his refutation of Maximinus the Arian during a public debate in 427 or 428 (Sumruld).⁵ The fact that the debate is being remembered 250 years *ex eventu* suggests the synod may have had a copy of the text at its disposal.

In sum, Augustine's name was continually invoked in the Byzantine East, less for the breadth and depth of his theological thought than for his robust struggle against Pelagianism and other heterodox elements. His zeal in those struggles, for which he campaigned in Alexandria by letter for legitimacy and support, elevated him to the list of revered fathers of the church early on – a status that Constantinople, represented by both emperor and patriarch, were pleased to acknowledge and affirm.

De Trinitate and the Filioque

The interpolation of the *filioque* into the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan creed was the decisive political wedge wielded by the Franks against Roman and Eastern bishops (see Sicienski). Frankish theologians appealed to Augustine in support of its use. Even so, Photios's *Mystagogy* – the first detailed refutation of the *filioque* to appear in the East – also upheld and defended the authority of Augustine. Whether or not Photios had direct access to Western sources is not known, but he was clearly loath to impute any serious theological errors to this Western father of the church. Even without having read him, Photios suggested that the Franks must have distorted Augustine's thought and writings. Appalled that a revered father of the church could be implicated in so vile a heresy, Photios argued that even if some aspect of Augustine's teachings did not accurately express the rule of faith, he should not be implicated in their distortion or misuse (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 14).

In any event, the real issue centered on Augustine's view of the Trinity and whether or not he understood the distinction between nature and person in the manner of his Greek-speaking counterparts, most notably Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus.⁶ Recent studies by Ayres (2004), Lienhard, and others have demonstrated that he did. As Harmless observes, Augustine clearly maintained the distinction between God's essence and the hypostatic properties of the Persons, as evidenced in his *On Faith and the Creed*:

The Holy Spirit is not inferior in nature to the Father and the Son, but is, as I would put it, consubstantial and co-eternal, for this Trinity is one God. This

⁴ Brian Daley advances the thesis that Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) had "fairly profound contact with the thought of Augustine" (101) and cites George Berthold's previous enumeration of possible points of contact (102-3).

⁵ A transcript of the debate was preserved in *Collatio Augustini cum Maximino*, a kind of stenographic record of the early fifth-century confrontation (Lienhard).

⁶ I am following Lienhard (81) in excluding Gregory of Nyssa and not linking together the remaining Cappadocians, both of whom are truer to Augustine's ken.

does not mean that the Father is the same Person as the Son and the Holy Spirit. It means, rather, that the Father is the Father, and the Son is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and that this Trinity is one God, as it is written: Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God (Dt 6:4) (quoted in Harmless: 283).

Perhaps even more significant is Joseph Lienhard's (84) surprising observation that the "crisp formula known as the Cappadocian settlement" – one essence (*ousia*), three Persons (*hypostases*) – comes from Books 5 and 7 of Augustine's *De trinitate*. Finally, in Book 4 of the same work, Augustine affirms the *principium* of the Father – a suitable Latin equivalent of the Greek *monarchia* – as the eternal source of the consubstantial Son and Spirit (Ayres 2008: 131-32). It is clear that Orthodox theologians today would benefit more from reading Augustine's own words than from accepting the misinformed interpretations inherited from our teachers.

After the Schism

Continuing difficulties in the relationship between Eastern and Western Romans, most notably the temporary schism between Patriarch Photios and Pope Nicholas I (resolved at the synod of Constantinople, 879-80⁷), could no longer be ameliorated in a conciliar manner due to the rise of the stern and unyielding Frankish papacy. In fact, it was the uniquely Gregorian political stance that led to the eleventh-century repudiation of the aforementioned council and the acceptance of an earlier synod in Constantinople (869-70), which had (temporarily) deposed Photios. Following the schism and the Fourth Crusade (1204), at which time the Franks came to occupy Byzantium, it was clear that the Greek East would have to come to know and understand Augustine's actual writings in order to defend his name as a father among the saints.

So far as is known, it was not until Maximus Planoude's thirteenth century translation of *De Trinitate*, sponsored by Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, that any major Augustinian theological work had come to be translated into Greek (Fisher). It was only a matter of time that other works also came to be translated, most notably by those, like the Kydones brothers,⁸ who were interested in engaging in theological debates with the Franks with an eye toward reestablishing ecclesiastical unity. It has been demonstrated that the Greek translation of *De Trinitate* was not only known and used by Palamas but played an important role in the Hesychast controversies of the fourteenth century (Flogaus 1998, 2008). Following in the footsteps of Photios and Palamas, the defense of Augustine by Mark of Ephesus, a fourteenth century opponent of union on Frankish terms, provides "conclusive evidence that Augustine, the individual, remained an authority for leading members of the Eastern Church until the end of the Byzantine empire (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 16). This fact is epitomized in the proclamation of Gennadios Scholarios, who was consecrated as Ecumenical Patriarch

⁷ Called by some Orthodox the Eighth Ecumenical Council, this synod affirmed the restoration of Photios to his see and anathematized anyone who recited the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan creed with the *filioque*. The council was ratified by Rome, but repudiated in the eleventh century.

⁸ Demetrios Kydones, a convert to the Latin church, served as chancellor (*mesazon*) under three emperors. His brother, Prochoros, was a monk-theologian who fervently opposed Palamite theology and hesychasm.

in the year that Constantinople fell to the Ottomans: “If anyone does not believe and call Augustine saint and blessed, he is anathema” (Papademetriou 2016).

After Byzantium: Russia and Greece

The affirmation of the blessed Augustine as a saint of the church continued in the East beyond the fall of Constantinople and throughout the Ottoman period. Near the turn of the eighteenth century, Patriarch Dositheos II of Jerusalem (d. 1707), following the manner of noted Byzantines centuries earlier, heralded Augustine as “blessed” even while warning against the dangers of Western influences.⁹ A century later, Augustine’s place among the fathers of the Church was fortified by Nikodemos the Hagiorite (d. 1809), a monk-theologian of the late eighteenth century, who described Augustine as “the divine and holy” (*theios kai ieros*) and inscribed him in his *Synaxarion* (Lives of the Saints), to be commemorated on June 15th. There Augustine is remembered with the words, “In memory of our Father among the Saints, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo” and hymned, “You were enflamed by the love of God, you demonstrated to be all splendid, blessed Augustine.” Like Photios and others before him, Nikodemos remained suspicious of the authenticity of statements attributed to Augustine championed by the Franks, refusing to attribute any error to the saint; however, he lauds him for the prolific volume of his works and laments the fact that Eastern Christians were largely deprived of the spiritual wealth of these valuable writings (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 19; Papademetriou 2016).

Moving now to tsarist Russia, it is a commonplace that Peter I (d. 1725), the first Romanov emperor, sought to bring Russia into the enlightened world by importing Western culture, an effort furthered by Catherine II (d. 1796). Peter’s educational reforms included the secularization of schools and the establishment of Western-style seminaries and curricula, going even so far as to mandate Latin among its intellectual institutions. This resulted in a reactionary pushback from the Church, generally referred to as the Slavophile movement, which sought to define Orthodoxy over against all things Western, both culturally and theologically. Unfortunately, this included Augustine.

Among the responses to the social, economic, and political turmoil of early twentieth-century Russia arose a movement known as sophiology. Based on the writings of Vladimir Solovyov (d. 1900), the school was represented most notably by Pavel Alexandrovitch Florensky (d. 1937), who remained in Russia and was eventually executed, and Sergei Nikolaevitch Bulgakov (d. 1944), who was exiled by the Bolsheviks in 1922 and settled in Paris.¹⁰ Although the school inherited the general Slavophile suspicion of things Western, as an intellectual movement it did not dismiss Augustine out of hand. Bulgakov in particular seriously engaged Augustine’s theology in challenging his doctrines concerning grace and the

⁹ Patriarch Dositheos II, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, was well aware of the theological issues between Roman Catholics and Protestants and sought to reaffirm Orthodox doctrines in light of their influences on the Church. He is best known for convening the Synod of Jerusalem (1672), which rejected the Calvinist writings of the otherwise celebrated Patriarch Cyril Lukaris (Cyril I) of Constantinople (d. 1638).

¹⁰ Bulgakov was founder and dean of the famous St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. A well-respected theologian, Bulgakov’s sophiological writings in particular were deemed too extreme for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which condemned them as heretical in 1935.

Trinity (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 21). Among the first to observe that Augustine's thinking about the Trinity began with the divine essence and not the hypostatic realities of the Persons, Bulgakov asserted that this led Augustine to equate the Spirit with love in a way that unites the Father and Son but leads the subordination of the Spirit. It is significant that Bulgakov did not view Augustine's approach as antithetical to the trinitarian understanding of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, but complementary to it (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 23).

Orthodoxy's continuing quest for self-identity in the modern world resulted in a response to the early twentieth century renaissance of Russian intellectualism that featured a renewed interest in patristic sources, including (but not necessarily culminating in) Gregory Palamas. Aided by Meyendorff's (1962) landmark study of Palamas, this so-called neo-patristic synthesis, represented especially by Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky, brought to the fore the classical Palamite distinction between God's divine essence and God's divine energies. More importantly, it sought to enlist help from the fathers of the Church in defining Orthodoxy and its place in the modern world. Its criticism of the West focused on its reliance on metaphysical concepts rooted in Augustine that, processed through scholasticism, made the perceived need for a Palamite understanding of God impossible for Western theology to grasp. For Florovsky and (especially) Lossky, it was not so much that Augustine was dismissed out of hand – scholasticism is the real culprit – but that Augustine supplied the raw materials for subsequent Latin errors that made the West unable to understand and appreciate the Palamite distinction, namely, an understanding of apophatic theology that was different from that of Pseudo-Dionysios (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 26).

Penultimate Developments

John Romanides (d. 2001), former Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Thessaloniki, represents one of Orthodoxy's first and foremost critics of Augustine's place in the Church. Whereas previous critiques of Augustine occurred within the context of a generally inferior Western theological tradition, Romanides identified Augustine even more boldly as the source of the West's errors, to be followed, of course, by Anselm, Aquinas, and others. The general thesis of Romanides (65-66) was that a great deal more cultural affinity existed between eastern and western ends of the Roman empire than scholars had previously surmised, and that real antipathy between East and West came about in 1009, when the Franks "captured" Rome and the papacy became a Frankish institution. This cultural and political divide, he writes, had been anachronistically imposed upon earlier centuries, obfuscating the fact that Latins and Greeks shared Roman identity.

Romanides asserts that the Franks used theological differences for the purpose of strengthening in-group/out-group identities (see Tajfel and Turner). He argues that Augustine was interpreted in a way that predicated the Spirit's very existence on the Father and the Son (68). This interpretation, Romanides asserts, was based on a series of "blunders" on the part of Augustine that distorted the orthodox and catholic understanding of the Spirit's concrete hypostatic distinctiveness (*proprium*). Such mistakes include: 1) an erroneous understanding of procession as eternal causality in parallel with the generation of the Son from the Father as ground of being (*principium*); 2) a misidentification of the Spirit as the common energies (*theotís*)

and love of the Father and the Son;¹¹ and, 3) a confusion in the distinction between revelation and the conceptual intuition of revelation; in other words, an overemphasis on the intellectual appropriation of divine concepts *sola ratio*, in contrast to the personal experience of revelation through participation in the uncreated energies of God by way of *theoria* (74-76). The last of these had implications for what one can and cannot know about God – more specifically, the distinction between God as unknowable in the divine essence and knowable through the experience of the divine energies. According to Romanides, Augustine presents himself as a kind of Eunomian in leaving open the possibility of seeking and knowing God's essence (77), confusing the distinction between *what* God is by nature and *who* God is through hypostatic self-revelation.

According to Romanides, it is this aspect of Augustine that the Franks capitalize upon in their defense of the *filioque*, to the effect that the Spirit's distinctive essential properties are distorted and diminished, thereby collapsing the symmetry between generation and procession emanating from the Father as the eternal ground of being. Thus, what Augustine got wrong was his inability to appreciate the distinction between the essence of God (*ousia*) and the distinct properties (*idiomata*) of the divine Persons (*hypostases*). Romanides acknowledges that Augustine accepted the most important aspect of the Trinitarian terminology of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Second Ecumenical Council, but charges Augustine with failing to understand why the distinction is being made.

Christos Yannaris follows Romanides in positing Augustine's lack of understanding concerning apophatic theology (and so also its logical culmination in the Palamite distinction between essence and energies) as the root cause of the East–West cultural, ecclesiastical, and theological divide. Yannaris also follows Romanides in charging Augustine with positing knowledge of God as a philosophical exercise, rejecting the experience of the triune God in favor of an intellectual activity that objectifies the substantial unity and ignores hypostatic realities that deny the real experience of divine-human communion and, hence, *theosis* (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2008: 34).

This facile interpretation is challenged by the increasing identification of a concept of deification (*theosis*) in Augustine. Keating, for example, draws close comparisons between Augustine and Cyril on matters of deification. We also have Stan Rosenberg's exploration of Augustine on deification, which appears in this volume. Because Augustine does not use precisely the same terms, Yannaris and an entire generation of Orthodox scholars concluded that the notion of participation in God was somehow altogether foreign to Augustine, and hence to the West (Drever: 103). Despite the lack of specific parallel terminology, Augustine's use of *participatio* in the *Confessions*, and even more explicit language of deification in the *Sermons*, shows that Augustine was not all that far removed from Eastern understandings of deification. Drever argues that while Augustine clearly draws on Platonist concepts in his understanding of the Trinity and human "reunion" with God, he reinterprets Platonic ascent in traditional

¹¹ Reinhard Flogaus raises the question of whether or not, among other things, Gregory Palamas' description of the Spirit as the common love of the Father and the Son in Capita 150 (chaps. 36, 37) were borrowed from Augustine's *De Trinitate* (Flogaus 2014: 63-66).

pro-Nicene trinitarian and incarnational ways that nourish the life of the church (112; see also Bonner).

Another harsh critic of Augustine is found in the person of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, a near contemporary of Yannaris and one of the most revered Orthodox theologians alive today. Zizioulas challenges Augustine's understanding of the Trinity and perceives the West's preoccupation with the individual self as rooted in Augustine's rationalist and substantialist approach to acquiring knowledge of God. Zizioulas builds upon Bulgakov's observation concerning the Trinity – which by this time had become generally accepted – that Augustine's point of departure in approaching the triune God was the divine essence (*ousia*); however, unlike Bulgakov, Zizioulas does not see Augustine's approach as complementary to the Cappadocian formulation, but directly opposed to it. This error, Zizioulas reasons, resulted in a distortion of apophatic thinking that ultimately led to the West's inability to understand the Palamite distinction between essence and energies (Cohen: 225).¹²

By the latter half of the twentieth century, the notion that Augustine – and thus the West – begins with the essence of God and moves to the Persons, while the East begins with an immediate experience of hypostatic realities of the Persons, had become an unfortunate commonplace. Michel Barnes (1995a) finds in this simplistic and artificial dichotomization of trinitarian thought the influence of late-nineteenth century theologian Théodor de Regnon, whose simplistic and unsubstantiated model not only influenced Zizioulas, but echoes throughout an entire generation of Orthodox theologians.¹³ The polarized dichotomy between Greek East and Latin West, so pervasive in Orthodox scholarship of the twentieth century, has been of particular use to the Orthodox for establishing in-group and out-group identity formation. The shared patristic trinitarian theology that had been recognized up to and including Bulgakov, who saw Augustine's approach as complementary to the Cappadocian formulation, suddenly came to be taken up into the polarized paradigm of Greek East versus Latin West.¹⁴

This makes clear that one of the main problems in Orthodox readings of Augustine has been an ongoing tacit acceptance of outdated and inaccurate interpretations of Augustine in place of any real familiarity with the bishop's own writings. Even a cursory reading of *De trinitate* should dispel any notion that Augustine's understanding of the Trinity is anything but Orthodox prompting one Orthodox scholar to assert that Augustine's trinitarian understanding "is all but indistinguishable from that of the Cappadocians" (Hart: 195).

¹² It is the case that apophatic theology and the Palamite distinction between essence and energies do not occupy a central role in Zizioulas' theology (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2008: 35).

¹³ This generation included my own academic advisor and father confessor, John Meyendorff, who wrote, "Latin philosophy considers the nature in itself first and proceeds to the agent; Greek philosophy considers the agent first and passes through it to find the nature" (1974: 181).

¹⁴ I wish to thank Paul Blowers for calling this invaluable study to my attention, leading me also to consider a second relevant article by Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered" (1995b). Concerning the first article, it should be noted that it was not de Régnon's purpose to polarize theology between East and West, but to establish epochs – specifically characterized as "patristic" and "scholastic" – which then become easy to treat as mutually exclusive categories. The latter article presents developments in French Augustinian scholarship that deconstruct the polarity between Augustine and the Cappadocians.

Zizioulas' assertion that Augustine (and subsequent Western theology) begins with the substantial, and hence impersonal, aspect of God is simply wrong. Simply put, for Augustine, God's very essence is hypostatic, that is, personal (Cohen: 233).

It is worth noting that more than a decade after the publication of Barnes' landmark critique of de Régnon, Zizioulas continued to speak in terms of the East–West paradigm (Zizioulas: 124; Cohen: 232). The exaggerated distinction between the West's substantialist approach and the East's personalistic approach leads Zizioulas to assert a reason that Augustine, and hence the West, fell into a “solipsistic preoccupation with the self” and to associate Augustine's introspection with “self-centeredness and atomistic individualism” (Cohen: 234). According to Cohen, Zizioulas's attempt to draw stark contrasts between Eastern and Western ways of thinking led him to attribute a kind of radical interiority to Augustine that spawned every scourge ever to plague the West. Through this false dichotomy, Zizioulas misrepresents Augustine's inward search to encounter God as somehow moving away from God. But as Cohen points out:

For Augustine himself, of course, the inward realm of the self does not stand in opposition to or isolation from the realm of communion, of one's relationships either with God or with others. Indeed for Augustine, there is no depth or extent of inwardness that could possibly separate a person from God since, as Augustine famously wrote in his *Confessions*, themselves addressed to God, “You were more inward than the most inward place of my heart” (3.6.11) (234).

Even more pointedly critical than the foregoing examples, Michael Azkoul (1986) boldly asserts that Augustine's theology is not only heretical in itself, but that Augustine is responsible for every heresy the West has ever known. Azkoul surpasses Romanides in minimizing the role that Augustine's name and reputation played in the East prior to the time of Frankish ascendancy. He charges that Augustine's inclusion in the Synaxarion was only a recent phenomenon and that both Platonist and Manichean philosophies remained embedded in Augustine's unconscious even after his conversion. Another problem, according to Azkoul, lies with Augustine's sensuality, which he sees as one of Augustine's greatest personal obstacles (Papademetriou 2016).

Restoring Equilibrium

This brief overview suggests that the Augustine straw man should be assigned to the fire and that a balanced and more accurate view of Augustine should be adopted. An Augustine on his own terms and in his own words, free of the polemical baggage of the modern period and firmly set within the tradition of the whole *oikumene*, not just at odds with half of it. One of the most significant recent correctives to the negative appropriation of Augustine and his writings is the recent publication of papers delivered at a conference sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Studies program at Fordham University in June, 2007, entitled “Orthodox Readings of Augustine.”¹⁵ It is to the credit of program co-directors Aristotle Papanikolaou

¹⁵ This fine collection of studies, of which I was not aware at the time I proposed the topic of this paper, played a substantial role in confirming this paper's thesis, namely, that the Augustine that has been known in Orthodox circles is not the historical Augustine.

and George Demacopolous that such a groundbreaking and long overdue project would launch a series of successful and important conferences held triennially at Fordham. Their initiative fulfills George Papademetriou's call, issued more than a decade earlier, that "research and analysis of the works and doctrines of Augustine must continue to be done by Orthodox theologians to bring about a balanced and right Orthodox view of this great Western theologian-philosopher" (1994: 381). The fact that not all of the conference participants were Orthodox (with a capital "O") added strength and needed credibility to the project, in that its aim was not (as might be expected) to rehabilitate Augustine for purposes of bringing him back into the fold of Orthodoxy (as though he was ever outside of it!), but to bring the latest scholarship on Augustine into dialogue with reigning Orthodox misconceptions about him. According to the co-conveners, greater awareness of such misconceptions emerged as part of the larger context of Orthodox characterizations of the West.¹⁶

To conclude this paper, I would like to quote an excerpt of a pastoral letter of Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood in Platina, California, written to Michael Azkoul on June 13, 1981. Its closing words in large measure echo my own sentiments:

Let us assume . . . that one believes like Augustine on the transmission of original sin; that one knows little of the difference between the "transcendent" and the "economic" Trinity and sometimes confuses them. Can't one still be Orthodox? Does one have to shout so loudly one's "correctness" on such matters, and one's disdain (and this disdain is strongly felt!) for those who believe thus? In the history of the Church, opinions such as these, which disagree with the consensus of the Church have not been a cause for heresy hunts. Recognizing our fallible human nature, the Fathers of the past have kept the best Orthodox views and left in silence such private views, which have not tried to proclaim themselves the only Orthodox views.

I myself fear the cold hearts of the "intellectually correct" much more than any errors you might find in Augustine. I sense in these cold hearts a preparation for the work of Antichrist (whose imitation of Christ must also extend to "correct theology"); I feel in Augustine the love of Christ (93-101).

I would also like to end upon the words of the tropar to St. Augustine, sung every June 15, the day of his feast:

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 (quoted in Papademetriou 2016).

¹⁶ This discovery was explored in the Orthodox Christian Studies 2010 triennial conference, the papers of which are available under the title *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (Demacopolous and Papanikolaou 2013).

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