

Article

Deposito Diademate: Augustine’s Emperors

Peter Iver Kaufman

Jepson School, University of Richmond, Room 232, Jepson Hall, 28 Westhampton Way, Richmond, VA 23173, USA; E-Mail: pkaufman@richmond.edu; Tel.: +1-804-289-8003

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Abstract: To assist colleagues from other disciplines who teach Augustine’s texts in their core courses, this contribution to the Lilly Colloquium discusses Augustine’s assessments of Emperors Constantine and Theodosius. His presentations of their tenure in office and their virtues suggest that his position on political leadership corresponds with his general skepticism about political platforms and platitudes. Yet careful reading of his revision of Ambrose’s account of Emperor Theodosius’s public penance and reconsideration of the last five sections of his fifth book City of God—as well as a reappraisal of several of his sermons on the Psalms—suggest that he proposes a radical alternative to political conformity relevant to undergraduates’ conventional expectations of society’s progress and their parts in it.

Keywords: Augustine; Constantine; Theodosius; regalia; humility; empire; ardor *gloriae*

We should keep in mind, as we think about Augustine and political leaders, that he was on track to becoming one. But 386, in Milan, he gave up his career as orator—as what we might describe as a public relations operative, a post that helped other ambitious men make the kind of connections that led them to a provincial governorship. Instead, at Cassiciacum, near Milan, then at Thagaste, on his African estate, he presided over assorted friends contemplating more sublime or philosophical than political questions. He was traveling to establish a similar sort of countercultural, contemplative society when he was drawn into church leadership in Hippo Regius. He retained his disdain for what he perceived as a widespread “lust to be first” (*libido principandi*) and “lust to dominate” (*libido dominandi*), yet, as bishop of a bustling port from the late 390s, he had business with local magistrates and with statesmen governing Africa on behalf of Emperor Honorius to ensure that his brand of Christianity was well defended against rivals—Donatist Christians and pagans. Augustine, therefore, was both critical and acquiescent with respect to what we would regard as political life. We shall ask whether criticism trumped acquiescence.

The title of this plenary address, *deposito diademate*, refers to rulers setting aside their royal regalia when approaching the church. Augustine used the phrase sparingly, but, we shall see, the deference it signals was very much in his mind when he pondered the proper place of public service and the perils and impiety of political leadership ([1], 65.4, 86.8).¹ Yet, rather than begin with the piety and politics of his time, we shall explore his attitude towards power *in illo tempore*, with Moses, before we attend to Augustine's surprisingly infrequent comments on Rome's emperors, an infrequency that suggests the insignificance of politics as usual for him in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

Moses was an embarrassment. The Manichees, with whom Augustine associated for nearly 10 years—and through a few books of his *Confessions*—found Moses dishonorable. He stole from the Egyptians. Yet Augustine grew disenchanted with Manichaean cosmology and distressed by the Manichees' contempt for the Hebrew Scriptures, whereupon he came to Moses' defense. Though, his defense has a patchy quality. At first he professed that God ordered Moses to have his people relieve the idolaters on the Nile of the gold they used to gild their idols. As the defense proceeded, however, Augustine tried another explanation. Perhaps, God allowed—not commanded—the Hebrews to grab and go. Moses simply relayed their license to steal. “Steal”, Augustine then reconsidered, may be too strong a word, inasmuch as God would shortly, from Sinai, etch a “thou shall not” against larceny. Hence, continuing and concluding his anti-Manichaean exegesis, Augustine had the Hebrews expropriate Egyptians' wealth as wages for their work in captivity: back pay, not payback or ill-gotten gain. He granted that, had the idea originated with Moses, the exodus with Egyptian coin could ruin his reputation, as Manichees suggested; Moses would have been just as sinful as the people he delivered from bondage, in whom greed stirred as soon as God's orders (or permission) to plunder were relayed, as soon as they learned that they would not be departing empty-handed. (That sentiment shows Augustine was fretting, as he often did, about the inordinate desire to acquire.) Moses was exceptional; no guile or greed tainted his leadership. He had not coveted what he instructed (or allowed) others to take. Most important for Augustine, Moses had not disputed God's authority to punish the Egyptians, provision the Hebrews they enslaved, and—as it turned out—mystify the Manichees who mocked Old Testament stories. Moses understood that God's will, even when not instantaneously comprehensible, was always to be obeyed ([3], 22.71–72).

True, Moses did have a problem obeying God in the book of Numbers, and, as a result, was prohibited from entering the Promised Land. Also true, he prefigured the flinching of the faithful as he struggled to keep his arms aloft to ensure Israel's victory over the Amalekites in the Negev ([4], 352.6). Maybe the Manichees had some justification for radically distinguishing Old from New Testaments. Certainly there were flawed, even sinful leaders in the former. All rulers, whom the Hebrews' prophets berated, including the venerable King David, disappointed on occasion. Leaders in the New Testament were cut from different cloth. They were not to the manor born. They were proles—a fisherman, a carpenter from Galilee. Augustine suggested that God commissioned the powerless to shame the powerful. By the fifth

¹ Citations in the text give the book, section, and/or chapter numbers used in editions of Augustine's work, the most accessible of which is on-line at [2] (<http://www.Augustinus.it/latino/index.htm>), drawn from volumes 32 to 45, *Patrologia cursus completus, ser. Latina*, edited by Jacques Paul Migne and published in Paris from 1844 to 1864. To translate, I have consulted variations cited in relevant volumes of the *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* and the *Corpus Christianorum, series Latina*. The titles of Augustine's works appear in the reference section.

century, it seemed to be working; princes flocked to Rome, kneeling at the tombs of saints Peter and Paul and setting aside their regalia, *deposito diademate*. They apparently trusted they might learn something significant for their souls' salvation ([1], 65.4).

We need to be mindful that scholars disagree about the extent of imperial power during Augustine's tenure as bishop. Adolf Lippold painstakingly accumulated material evidence of provincial householders' independence from Rome and Ravenna ([5], pp. 54–55). Recently, Yale University Press—possibly aiming to capture the supermarket market—let Adrian Goldsworthy subtitle his long convoy of arguments for the imperial government's diminished capacity, “The Death of a Superpower” ([6], p. 312). Yet, in Western parts of the empire, despite pressures from the Goths and Vandals, Emperors Theodosius I and his son Honorius still had appreciable say and sway. Augustine relied on them. What mattered to him was that his emperors continued to make what Peter Heather called “highly Christian noises” that kept their chanceries churning out edicts against Donatists, pagans, and pelagians. Augustine was aware and grateful that his emperors were capable “to exert a powerful pull on the allegiances and habits of [Rome's] provinces” ([7], pp. 126–28).

But let us look more closely at that “pull”. Augustine, as a bishop from the 390s to 430, could hardly have been indifferent to privileged parishioners whose local “pull” depended on the central government's. Their attachments to things of this world—possessions, promotions, and reputations—were deeply rooted in their characters and culture. Very few rose above that desire to acquire. Most were ordinary and imperfect. Yet Augustine would not allow them to wallow in their imperfections. Both the imperfections and wallowing were among his principal pastoral concerns. He preached persistently to those unable to decathect from what he called “the business of Babylon” ([1], 44.25).

You can almost hear the sneer in his *Confessions*, when he referred to “the streets of Babylon”, as if he were describing a city's sordid districts, a graphic novel's Gotham of greed and gore. Though, he referred similarly to unsavory practices around the imperial Court in Milan where, as orator for hire, he advanced his career, lacing with lies the eulogies he delivered to flatter the powerful while other ambitious place-seekers—knowing he lied—were nonetheless quick to praise him ([8], 2.3, 8; 6.6, 9). In his sermons, “Babylon” becomes a city (*civitas*) or state (*respublica*), so one may be excused for suspecting Augustine had what we call politics or statesmanship in mind when he preached about “the business of Babylon,” extending his scorn to the politics of an empire, which he described as “aging and shriveling up” ([4], 51.6). That, after all, was what empires did. Conquest, oppression, and shriveling had not started with Rome or Carthage. The Assyrians were equally successful, equally cruel, equally conceited, yet eventually overtaken. No point trying to comprehend why God needed to reward Assyrians and Romans with their empires. The former never worshipped him; they and the latter persecuted those who did, yet still seemed sufficiently virtuous to warrant hegemony in time for a time. God's ways with this world often baffled onlookers, but, Augustine maintained, those ways were never unjust ([9], 5.15, 5.21).

When the time was right—in God's sight—God converted an emperor. Augustine was relatively dispassionate about Constantine's conversion. The few references to that emperor in his sermons and correspondence avoided celebration. In a long letter on the nature of faith, for example, Augustine argued that one need not see to believe that Constantine founded the city of Constantinople, but omitted mentioning what Constantine saw—specifically, the vision that brought him to the faith, dazzling him and dazzling generations of the faithful who dated their deliverance to that time ([10], ep. 286).

Tributes to Constantine and Theodosius surface at the end of the *City of God*'s fifth book, immediately after Augustine discusses what qualified as virtuous leadership. Rulers ought to be self-assured yet not arrogant, unmoved by flattery, slow to punish, inclined to pardon, devoted to taking command of themselves—and only then to commanding others. But the capsule on Constantine that follows this wish-list lands squarely on *none* of those qualities. One learns about Constantine's reign—that it was long and prosperous—not about Constantine's virtues ([9], 5.24–25; [11], pp. 556–59).

Elsewhere, Augustine defended Constantine (and Christianity) against accusations that the former's seemingly sudden disaffection and defection from Rome's old religions prompted the empire's fourth- and early fifth-century setbacks—frontiers crossed, battles lost, and cities sacked. Augustine touted Constantine's part in fulfilling God's promise, made in the Hebrews' psalms, which prophesied that the whole earth would hasten to believe in Jesus. *Ante oculos vestros*, “before your very eyes”, he preached, “the pagans' idols were overthrown”, proving that his faith's story was “promising”, so to speak: Christianity's sacred texts foretold without stipulating precisely *where* or *when* the empire would turn to the new faith—foretold *that* it would turn, as Emperor Constantine had. It was all God's doing. God had seized the Roman Empire ([4], 62.1; [10], 1.14, 21). Numbers after commas designate sections in the original; traditional references for classical texts.

Though, then the empire seemed to seize up, and its western parts fell apart. Christians asked why. Augustine speculated that the reason was that many who professed the new faith, the not-so-faithful-faithful emperors among them, had not done their part. Their piety was, if not insincere, insubstantial. It proved no match for those lusts to be first, to dominate. Hence, the Christian empire got knocked about. The promises in the psalms were still relevant, but any political fulfillment was out of the question. The Christian empire's humiliation in and after 410 was neither a turning point nor a stopping point, but, Augustine proposed, the disappointment tested the faith of the faithful, tested, and reoriented it [12].

Augustine was relatively indifferent to much of fourth-century political history. He could not be bothered with Emperor Constantius II, the one son and heir of Constantine who survived the two their father left alive and who ruled alone for 11 years, nearly as long as his father. Augustine remembered that Valens, emperor in the East from 364–378, preferred the Arian or Homoian Christology, outlawed at Constantine's Council of Nicaea in 325, and that Valens had persecuted the Nicenes, but Augustine stopped short of denouncing Valens as angrily as had his Nicene colleagues. Ambrose, for one, attributed the empire's catastrophic defeat at Adrianople, where Valens died, to the defeated and deceased emperor's Arian sympathies. God's wrath; game over ([9], 18.52; [13], 2.16, 139).

Theodosius succeeded Valens in the East. His restraint impressed Augustine. Having rescued the young Valentinian II from one usurper and having intimidated other rivals in the West, he left the youngster enthroned, returned to Thessalonika and Constantinople, and put leading anti-Nicene prelates were at a decisive disadvantage ([14], pp. 220–21). That equally impressed Augustine, who favored the Nicene party. But Emperor Theodosius's record on paganism was uneven, too much so to please African bishops. True, his anti-pagan decrees seemed far-reaching and his victory, in 394, at the River Frigidus suppressed a regime that relied on—and reportedly cultivated—a revival of interest in paganism, but the circumstances were complicated. The Frigidus outcome nested in contemporary Christian chronicles as Christianity's victory over Rome's old gods. The emperor's prayers were said to have summoned the strong winds that prevented weapons hurled by his enemies from reaching their targets. Augustine

condensed the story, kept the prayers and winds to document the effectiveness of Theodosius's piety, but kept the story very, very short ([9], 5.26). Perhaps Augustine was simply underscoring his insistence that Christians ought not to expect an uninterrupted series of military miracles from their Christian emperors. Perhaps he was reluctant to celebrate statesmen in arms—or politics—who fell far short of his ideal. Yet Augustine may also have abbreviated his account because some parts of the story were difficult to reconcile with the idea that the Frigidus was a whopping victory for Christianity. Eugenius, the would-be whom Theodosius defeated, was a Christian. Arguably, he and his accomplices had been compelled to seek support among pagans by the emperor's cavalier, condescending appointment of his nine-year old son Honorius to rule in the West. Possibly Augustine would also have been informed that Theodosius marched roughly as many pagan troops to the Frigidus as did his enemies ([15], pp. 94–95, 122–23). All told, the causes as well as combat, along with other available evidence of Theodosius's appointments and allies, suggest that he was relatively uninterested in evangelizing the empire. He was content, working with non-Christians—particularly with members of the aristocracy who remained resistant to Christianity yet who refrained from publicly protesting his regime's opposition to pagan sacrifices ([5], p. 134; [9], 5.26; [16], p. 187).

One encomiast, however, gives posterity a very different Theodosius, and Augustine would have known of both. Poet Prudentius alleged that the emperor had turned evangelist, urging pagans to give up their cults and to trade up to Christianity ([17], 1.423–24). Augustine said nothing about the oration that Prudentius remembered or invented to add a sensational aftermath in Rome to Theodosius's victory at the Frigidus (in Slovenia). But the poet's story (and Theodosius's resolve to convert pagans) must have acquired sturdy legs, because it required refutation before two hundred years passed. The sixth-century pagan Zosimus, referring to the oration, insisted that Roman pagans refused to take seriously either their emperor or his faith ([18], 4.59).

Augustine could no more have subscribed to Zosimus' reading of Theodosius's irrelevance than to Prudentius' messianic, majestic tiger-of-an-emperor. Indeed, Augustine was ill-at-ease with majesty or, to be precise, with poet-orators who, much as he once had in Rome and Milan, marketed majesty and trumpeted the virtues of statesmen. Early in the fifth century, he pilloried politicians who "love temporal power" and who "seek their own glory in the subjection of others" ([19], 19.31). Later, composing his *City of God*, he continued to deflate the residual optimism about Christian empire. He lost his faith in Rome's fate, as R. P. C. Hanson noticed. On reviewing its past and surveying its present, Augustine concluded that, in Hanson's words, "the empire must be condemned". "It had placed its whole hope and trust in success [in glory], and by that worldly standard it had at last failed, as it inevitably was destined in the end to fail" ([20], p. 276). Hanson's "at last" and "in the end" are telling. They reflect Augustine's take on government, leaving us with a question: what could be redeemed—what could he redeem—"in the end".

A Christian emperor's humility! That was a colossally important lesson for all creatures who coveted honor, status, and power. Of those, rulers were most tempted to court notoriety and to treasure titles. Hence, Theodosius was exceptional, a celebrated statesman who prized piety over celebrity. To Augustine, he looked to have learned not only to resist this wicked world's seductive rewards but also not to brag about his resistance ([9], 5.18). Conceivably, Augustine wrote his cameo account of Theodosius in the *City of God* to ensure that the emperor's subjects (Christians and pagans alike) perceived the challenges to be humble, acknowledge human frailty, and negotiate celebrity—when and if it comes—without

fanfare. Emperors were useful, on their knees and with their regalia set aside—*desposito diademate*. Using Theodosius, Augustine, in effect, counselled the powerful to cultivate “a conception of themselves as repentant sinners”—and to conduct themselves accordingly. ([21], p. 153).

A number of Augustine’s sermons, his *Confessions*, and his *City of God* identified repentance as the “sacrifice” that God expects. Repentance required creatures to acknowledge how far short of perfect righteousness they had fallen and to present their contrite hearts as an offering (*sacrificium contriti cordis*). Sacrifices of hearts “bruised” by scalding self-accusations (bear in mind the multiple confessions in Augustine’s *Confessions*) alerted creatures to their dependence on their creator. The signs of same, from start to forever, were self-discipline, denunciation of self-deception, and an acknowledgment that contrite hearts were not only offerings to God but God’s work, teaching and redeeming the penitent as well as onlookers. Repentance of this nature, Augustine insisted, echoing the apostle Paul, confirmed that the penitent were not conformed to this age ([9], 10.5–6).

No wonder, then, Augustine’s tribute to Theodosius culminates with the penance required by Ambrose after the emperor ordered the slaughter of citizens in Thessalonica. Dodging the details, Augustine packed in just enough to exonerate Theodosius and incriminate his bloodier-minded partisans. What was meant to grab attention was the proclamation set at the start, where Augustine asserted that “nothing was more marvelous than religious humility”. The emperor’s self-abasement then sprawls across what follows. Augustine has Theodosius make explicit—and dramatic—that air, light, soil, the expanse of empire, as well as glory for expanding the last were given by God to the virtuous as well as to the wicked, although the devotion exhibited in a powerful man’s penance is a gift reserved for the great, good, and faithful ([9], 5.26).

Augustine inflected what Bishop Ambrose reported about the emperor’s disrobing before his public expressions of sorrow for sins: Theodosius so prostrated himself that he brought tears to the eyes of all who beheld his humility. Augustine editorialized to suggest that, at the grave, statesmen must relinquish their power, *desposito diademate*. From there, the righteous take only their righteousness with them ([9], 5.2; [22], section 34; [23], pp. 183–84).

Ambrose worked himself into the story as its chief protagonist, specifying that every priest’s duty was to confront wrongdoers. God would almost certainly punish a timid bishop. Speaking truth to power, of course, was never easy. A bishop’s truth-telling could have had terrible consequences for colleagues and their churches as the emperor’s anger ricocheted around his realm. So Ambrose’s audacity was all the more impressive ([24], 11.3–11). Still, Augustine dropped Ambrose from his narrative: “The discipline of the church” brought the emperor to his knees ([9], 5.26). Ambrose was missing as well from a sermon Augustine preached on penance, the point of which was to shame auditors too embarrassed to grieve publicly for their sins as the emperor had done ([4], 392.3). Arguably, Ambrose spooled his stories to promote the interests of the church, his alternative infrastructure—which was complementary to, yet somewhat independent of, the Court. Though, Augustine’s interests diverged from those of his illustrious acquaintance.

Theodosius died in 395. Thereafter, the emperor to whom Augustine and his African colleagues appealed was his son Honorius, who ruled the West after his father’s death until 423. Often, on his watch, Italy was overrun; Honorius’s record on “state security” was abysmal ([16], p. 234). He and his brother Arcadius in Constantinople never ventured far from the safety of their courts, which prompted Bishop Synesius of Cyrene to argue that only emperors with first-hand knowledge of war knew how to preserve

the peace ([25], section 16). Africa was remote from the frontiers where war-formed and warlike emperors were wanting. Augustine and his catholic colleagues appeared satisfied to have Emperor Honorius's support, especially his edicts against the Donatists. No reason to lionize Honorius, therefore, but no cause to censure him. Christians' enthusiasms for empire had ebbed. But the emperor and his representatives in Africa were still serviceable, while the faithful awaited a victory yet to come ([1], 123.4). For, as Augustine often said, the world was an unsettled, unsettling place, "an evil place"—*malus est mundus* ([4], 80.8); Christians' challenges were to retain hope in their ultimate, celestial victory, to restrain their basest desires, and to pay God's love forward, practicing compassion ([4], 105.8–9). Augustine's Theodosius helped inspire the faithful to meet those challenges. He was unaffected, uninfected by *ardor gloriae*, the passion for glory. Some other idealizations of the emperor studied by Jörg Ernesti, tugged him closer to figures around whom imperial cults had formed—a granite statue draped with archaic Roman virtues to appeal to senators who, Ernesti suggests, tilted toward nostalgia for paganism ([23], pp. 349–50). Christian idealizations were just as tendentious (as Prudentius showed us), and why not? Theodosius gave devotees of his faith what they "most wanted", as John Matthews noticed: piety, deference to bishops, partisan legislation. The emperor did signal on occasion that he preferred to suppress paganism ([26], p. 252). We know now, however, that a number of his appointments reflected a less than persistent antagonism and that Christianity's prospects were not as promising as Prudentius or Ambrose—but not as Augustine—had hoped. Augustine's hopes attached to the emperor's personality—not to his policy. Theodosius, he said, enjoyed his Christianity, happier being in church than ruling the world ([9], 5.26; [27], pp. 135–42).

A short summary is in order before we apply a few generalizations addressing issues that often surface when we teach or discuss what has been described as Augustine's political theology. Clearly, Augustine had difficulty warming to Constantine, whose virtues seemed to him political or pragmatic and insufficiently personal. Hence, he served them up chilled, with what Jean-Marie Salamito dubs *la froideur augustiniennes* ([11], pp. 561–62). Theodosius was better suited to Augustine's purposes. It was easier to lift him than to hoist Constantine from this world's sordid practices and to lower or humble him to make a case that was emblematic for Augustine from the 380s to his death, a case against "the lust to be first", *libido principandi* ([8], 3.8, 16). Now that is an extraordinary place to find a politician! Or might it have been (and still be) a summons for an extraordinary politician?

How, then, should we read Augustine's purposes in featuring the empire's leading fourth-century statesmen in his *City of God*? What might interest our faculty and student colleagues who come across parts of that *City* or a sample of his sermons or a cut from his *Confessions* in their core courses? I want to suggest two plausible and popular responses before endorsing a third, less popular at present but, I shall argue, more defensible.

Commonly among ethicists and a number of historical theologians [28–30], Augustine is taken to have added theological virtues to the political virtues he supposedly admired. The result is a renewed faith in political culture. Statesmen in the 21st century must learn from Augustine, colleagues subscribing to this first approach say, to extract from the squalid, seamy, side of their business "an order of love" or the lesson of humility that will help renew faith in what is both humane and politically possible, in what Eric Gregory calls "a morally robust Augustinian civic liberalism" ([28], p. 298). That would likely be uplifting, but it would not be Augustine.

A second interpretation was fashionable for decades after Henri Xavier Arquillière published his essay on political Augustinianism in the 1930s and credited Augustine with having motivated hierocratic theorists to assert the church's authority over secular governments. Debate swirled for some time thereafter around the extent to which Augustine would have sanctioned claims of that sort [31]. But the claims persisted. It was widely thought that, after Pope Gregory I (590–604) introduced several strategic tropes, popes and their apologists drew Augustine's *deposito diademate* into their arguments for papal supremacy, specifically for Rome's right to appoint and depose secular sovereigns.

A third approach emphasizes Augustine's recoil from politics and takes it to signal a dramatic reorientation. Emperors shed their regalia when they drew close to the shrines of Saints Peter and Paul, in Augustine's accounts, not because the church is superior to their "states" but because it is a wholly and holy other order.

Recoil and reorientation: speaking this morning to a convocation of freshmen and sophomores who participate in the college's core course, I deployed Augustine to underscore the value of both. I took the third approach to his positions on emperors, statesmanship, and political leadership to offer alternatives to the contagious careerism so many undergraduates bring to college and to the core—careerism that makes students impatient with instruction in the arts and humanities. Pre-professional programs in business or finance, journalism or law, are all the rage on campuses, notwithstanding a realization that unexpected socio-economic swerves play havoc with careers; they bloc some paths and open others. In effect, they put a premium on undergraduates' and graduates' agility—versatility. During Augustine's tenure, the "swerve" or crisis sped along the disintegration of the empire in the West. In 410 the Goths sacked Rome, and other incursions chased refugees across the Mediterranean. The capital and Roman portions of the European continent had been troubled before, but the fifth century's first decade deprived pagans and Christians alike of the faith that their empire would be—as Virgil's Jupiter (although not, as Augustine repeatedly pointed out, the Christians' God) had promised—without end, *sine fine* ([32], 1.279).

The crossbeams of our empire are hardly as sturdy as they once seemed, yet one need not speculate about political collapse to find Augustine's stirring call for recoil and reorientation relevant. Sections of the economy and the stability of local institutions are often in jeopardy, so the skills needed for reorientation, for changing the trajectory of one's interests and career are always in season. Augustine praised Theodosius because—whether he saw it or wanted to see it—the emperor subscribed to an alternative vision of what was preeminently important. And, removing their regalia, *deposito diademate*, the powerful self-consciously became prodigals and pilgrims as often as they honored the saints and sacraments, portals through which the sacred streams into the profane.

To one of the faithful who confided that he desired to surrender his military command to catch more of that stream by entering a monastery, Augustine wrote urging that he stay his course, do damage control (check the Vandal invasion), and periodically, through prayer, enter a better place. God placed that soldier—as well as emperors and magistrates—in their respective roles. Their relief—but not their release—was to decathect or disinvest ([9], 19.6). Civic piety and municipal morality might contribute to general wellbeing. But informed Christians knew that, *in hoc saeculo maligno*, in this wicked world, all was driven by self-love, *amor sui* ([9], 18.49). The best one could do was acknowledge imperfection and discover times and places and alternative communities where the virtues of humility, compassion, and forgiveness might prosper.

Negotio, the ordinary business of our lives, has us all in its grip. But *Deificari...in otio* ([10], 10.2); in leisure (and Augustine accompanied leisure with friendships, contemplation, and conversation), the serious work of personal re-formation proceeds. Augustine trusted that an alternative love—compassion—and an alternative orientation—humility—would create and hold together alternative associations—convents and churches. Ideally, the social practices of those two would inspire the forgiveness that issued in reconciliations. A preternatural compassion breathed into the hearts of the faithful was the foundation of the peace that sustained the social practices of such communities ([33], 3.16, 21), where the faith, hope, and love were, Augustine insisted, different from those on offer in the terrestrial city.

Augustine was good at finding those places where the values and trajectories of this wicked world did not seem to apply. His efforts can contribute to the sentiments of students who find him in our core courses. Indeed, those places in our colleges may be the alternatives that will save them from the blowback occasioned by subsequent realizations that their guilds' skills inhibit their humanity. Perhaps, Augustine along with their exposure to the humanities in core courses will keep undergraduates from the revelation that moved attorneys to write the indictment I recycled this morning from Stanley Fish's suggestive essay on professionalism. It reflects the lawyers' lament that "mindless specialization" and competition rules out self- or social criticism in their practice. "We have become acculturated to an unnecessarily limiting way of seeing and experiencing law and lawyering", they complain,

a way which can separate lawyers from their sense of humanity and their own values. When that separation occurs, the profession easily becomes experienced as only a job or role, and human problems as only legal issues. Care and responsibility then yield to exigencies and strategems; and legal education, instead of reflecting the aspiration and searching that embody law and lawyering, can all too easily become an exercise in attempted mastery and growing cynicism ([34], p. 217).

Augustine is not the antidote to acculturation of this sort, but his questioning cultural premises and the ambitions they foster illustrates how the humanities can take our students out of maintenance mode. Instead of teaching them how to perform in "the system", I want them to transform systems, to envision something wholly different from what could trap them in "a way of seeing and experiencing" to which they had been habituated. Augustine's pilgrims, prodigals, statesmen, and emperors help me help them. Whether you are convinced Augustine can make that difference or disinclined to think it should be part of an educator's task to inspire it or are unpersuaded that historical study of Augustine can support my deployment of him, permit me, again, to thank you for making Augustine part of our culture's core—and thank Augustine for demoting the desire to acquire, tucking away the lust to be first, and introducing perhaps frightening, yet potentially fulfilling alternatives to the robust civic humanisms that too often stymie (or completely confound) our chances to change the rules.

Critics of my work [35] say that I have replaced with pessimism Augustine's evangelical confidence in Christians' ability to respond to the grace of conversion. I say they misplaced their confidence in the receptivity of our various systems to conversion and displaced (or attenuated) Augustine's confidence in grace, which, for him, made radical rather than incremental changes.

The "grace of conversion" cannot bring heaven to earth—the celestial is still celestial—but it can make the new now and make the now new.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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