Wilco de Vries, editor, an issue dedicated to Augustine, *Sophie*, the magazine of the Stichting voor Christelijke Filosofie (Foundation for Christian Filosofie) , Amersfoort, the Netherlands, October 2022. **<** www.sophieonline.nl >

> This is a thematic edition about St. Augustine 354-430 AD, Bishop of Hippo. Bishop Augustine was a Berber African and a productive theological pioneering writer and looked upon as a pioneering leader even today after many centuries.

Wilco de Vries, "Editorial"

With clock-like regularity new books about St. Augustine appear or symposia are organized where you can listen to his opinions about rest, love and the good life. This is a sufficient reason for us as Sophie editors to publish a thematic edition about the Bishop of Hippo. We are going to hold discussions with Jamie Smith, Paul van Geest and yours truly about the actuality of Augustine's theology and philosophy. Roel Kuiper, Mathijs Lamberigts and Harm Goris read Augustine in the manner by which he himself wanted to be read: critically. In his book *On the Trinity* Augustine asks his reader to embrace all that is true in his writings and to critique him for his errors. Kuiper follows this advice when he writes about Augustine's political thought and about whether Augustine has created a political philosophy. Lamberigts and Goris follow the same advice in their articles about Augustine's and Thomas of Aquinas' opinions about sexuality.

Aaron Ebert takes us one step further back and writes about how Augustine's sense of truth was formed from, among other sources, his flirtation and confrontation with skepticism. In the midst of a world bewitched by falsehood and misleading, Augustine sought live a truthful life. In our period of fake news and deep fake we can still learn much from Augustine, according to Ebert. Augustinians, monks who live according to Augustine's monastic rule, follow him in this ideal of the truthful life. Martijn Schrama is such a monk who writes about the origin of Augustinians and their spirituality. While Schrama reflects about living with Augustine, Hans Alderliesten delves into Augustine's thought about the curse that touches all of us, namely, death.

In this edition about a philosopher-theologian who wrote lyrically about the restless heart, we cannot avoid a moment of silence and meditation. In addition to articles that sharpen our thoughts, you will also find three pages of citations from Augustine about praise, humility and love. We thank Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, one of our co-editors, for this contribution.

If you need to reflect about the time Augustine lived and about the important moments in his life, read artist Jaap Hulst's account of his life in the pull-out poster in the middle of this edition.

Finally, we, the editorial team, are busy thinking about the continuity and future of Sophie. What do you like about this edition? What could be improved? Would you like to see a thematic number on a certain philosopher? Let us know via sophie@christelijkefilosofie.nl . After all, fans of Sophie always listen to good advice (Proverbs 12:15).

"The Contemporary Augustine:

A Debate between Two Theologian-Economists."[1]

By Teunis Brand & Joost Hengstmengel

For some, Augustine was a bishop from a time long past. For others as psychologist and as economist, he was an avant garde discussant in contemporary debates. Paul van Geest, professor of Church History at the University of Tilburg as well as professor of theology and economic thought at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, and Wilco de Vries, a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University Divinity School, belong to the last category. *Sophie* brought them together for a dialogue about the continuing relevance of Augustine's thought. Teunis and Joost began their debate with the question: How did you guys come in contact with Augustine? (Roel Kuiper is professor in "Christian identity" at the Theological University, Kampen |Utrecht, the Netherlands.)

Van Geest: I am now 56 years old. That may not be old, but it is long enough to enable me to look back on part of my life. I am from the generation that has experienced a Catholic youth. I also attended a genuine Jesuit college. By that time there were only a small number of Jesuits. The rector was a classic Jesuit who brought me into contact with Augustine. He had us translate pieces from Latin in *The Confessions*, not the most difficult but definitely the most pregnant. That had a double purpose: We learned some Latin and we were introduced to Augustine, the searcher of souls.

[1] Original title: "Augustinus als tijdgenoot: Een gesprek tussen twee theoloog-economen."

As a young man, Augustine entertained certain questions, which the Jesuits wanted us to air as well. Why am I here on earth? What must make me feel guilty? For what should I be grateful? These issues formed a mindset during my youth that has never left me. I started to study the Dutch language and, after that, theology. While studying Dutch literature you soon notice that Augustine was a tremendous source in medieval literature for all sorts of catechetical tracts. Then I went to study theology in Rome. And, of course, one cannot deal with sin, original sin, free will, nature or grace without being facing Augustine.

Public and Private Interest

De Vries: I grew up in a Reformed or Gereformeerd[2] community. There were books by Augustine on my father's bookshelf. Quite different from your situation, I had little interaction with him at middle school. When I started studying economy in Rotterdam there was an economic crisis. I then began research into the relationship between public and private interests, especially about the question how this was historically conceived. I did research in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, among others in Adam Smith. In that context, you run into Augustine, for his ideas about self-love are an important source for how theologians and economists during those centuries thought about that relationship.

[2] "*Gereformeerd"* refers to the Reformed denomination that seceded from the *Hervormde* or former state church. Abraham Kuyper had a hand in its organization.

Upon completion of my studies in economics, I proceeded to study theology. It was there I came into contact with Maarten Wisse. He had just written the book *Trinitarian Theology beyond Participation: Augustine's De Trinitate and Contemporary Theology.* I did a one-on-one course with him and literally crawled through that book with him. That was very educational. Subsequently, I studied at the American Duke University, where Paul Griffith lectured on Augustine. That is when my real love was kindled. And now I am writing a dissertation about Augustine's perspectives on self-love, love of neighbour and love of God.

Augustine's Unimpeded Actuality

Van Geest: Of course, you cannot not really avoid Augustine. He continues to be of interest. For example, he was very fundamental in the manner in which we think about freedom in all possible aspects. He is actually the first to have thought systematically about the meaning of our free will by means of the world in which we live, that is changeable and fleeting. Somewhere he states that our free will is determined by our physicality. Secondly, in his Trinitarian theology he has reflected on the interaction of human potentials. According to Augustine, the divine Trinity is not that difficult to understand. Well, it *is* for people who reflect logically, for three can never be one. But, he states somewhere in *De Trinitate*, we humans have three faculties--memory, the will and reason. They are three different faculties that are at the same time tied to each other. I do not want something I do not

remember. I do not want something about which it is known, when I reflect logically, that it is not good for me. And then you have the famous story about theft of pears (*The Confessions*, Book 2), in which he says that it is ridiculous that I do something that I know it is not good. At this point, you see, we have dark main springs, namely two wills. Augustine is the first to have reflected on this subject systematically and that is literally fodder for psychologists.

Augustine's thought about happiness also remains relevant. For some, happiness is found in the material: a large house, car or wealth. Augustine would say that these things are fleeting; they can change, a truth I find highly actual and that I also teach to my economic students in Rotterdam. Then you often fear that this passes them by. You don't find happiness there. However, I do not give them a ready-made answer from Augustine as to what does constitute happiness, but that it is not found only in the material, something that you can explain beautifully in our time from the work of Augustine. To have three fun evenings with friends brings more happiness than riding in an expensive car to make others jealous. Those are the points I think about; we can do something with them. The taxpayer does not pay me because I studied Augustine; I also return something to them: his ideas.

Hermeneutical Jargon

De Vries: Augustine needs to be studied in the tension of history and actuality. He lived at a

different time, even while the past is always with us. That is what Hans-Georg Gadamer, a German philosopher and author of *Waarheid en Methode* calls a "working history." I find that so fascinating with Augustine. A reader of his *Confessions* reads a historical document on the one hand, but you can recognize yourself in it on the other. In his "On the Road with Saint Augustine," James Smith reflects along the lines of Augustine on friendship, freedom and desire. These are always actual topics with which Augustine can help you along.

Van Geest: You correctly point to the hermeneutics of Gadamer. If you include yourself within his framework of interpretation and in the community of communication to which Augustine also belonged, then the borders between present and past become very fluid. From that perspective, Augustine can become a contemporary who speaks to you. Actually, that is a citation from Benedict XVI. He said at one time during an interview, "I experience Augustine as my contemporary who speaks to me." Then I thought to myself that I sometimes also experience the same when I read him. Actually, though, you can never fully trust him. For example, you need to ask why he did not write about the death of his son in *The Confessions,* while he did about the death of his mother. He undoubtedly had a pedagogical reason for this. Nevertheless, he speaks timelessly to me; I can work with his advice without using overly complicated hermeneutical language. That is not the case with other church

fathers. With Ambrose, for example, it is much more complicated due to his allegorical speech.

The Theology of Love

De Vries: Augustine appeals to me also because he writes so much about love. Who does not want to love or be loved? He is and remains the theologian of love.

Van Geest: Indeed. In two words he says somewhere "*Amari et amare,"* thus to be loved and to love, in that sequence. That, in fact, is the basis for his entire doctrine of grace, which is simultaneously a psychology, for you cannot love if you yourself are not loved. If my parents had not loved me, it would have been more difficult for me to cherish my children. You pass on what you have received. It is on that basis that he developed his entire theology of grace. Today, for example, we cannot approve the bonus culture. You do stuff not only on your own strength and you are not brilliant by nature. You've had a good education, thanks to your parents, and you are born in the right country. Thus, thinking in terms of meritocracy and bonus culture is from the evil one, something that we also learn from Augustine.

De Vries: What I so appreciate in *The Confessions* is that Augustine begins with God and being loved and then ends with a vision of God in heaven. When he writes about his past in books 1-9, he begins and ends with his mother Monica. This literary style whereby an author begins and ends with the same topic shows that

Augustine regarded his life as a gift. It is God who creates and recreates and does so through mother Monica. That's why he pays so much attention to his mother in *The Confessions.* Augustine is carried. I find that so fascinating: an intellectual great who starts his autobiography with being carried by grace.

Van Geest: With Augustine one can trace everything down to certain basic principles. The principle that I often explain to economists in Rotterdam is the distinction between "uti" and "frui." In his *De Doctrina Christiana* and in *The City of God* Augustine deals with things and objects that you can use. That is "uti." You can sit on a chair; you can use it. You do not need to respect the rights of a chair, for a chair has no soul. But with nature it is different. As to nature he says—they had a kind of intuition for nature in the early Church—that you cannot just use nature without repercussions. It is living which means you must treat it with greater respect than dead things. Augustine is and remains the theologian of love. You can use animals, but you must also care for them. In other words, you must make sure that an animal is given his rights. And then you move on slowly to enjoyment, the "frui." It is the same with people. You may never use them. A person must be enjoyed because he is an individual.

And then comes the basic question: What do you need from me to make you a better, happier, more liberated person? Here you are on the side of the *frui* and in the perspective of enjoyment because of God. If you are aware that the Creator

God has made you as a part of His creation, then you are likely to adopt a very different perspective than if you think you are the centre of the world and need to maintain yourself at the expense of all others. We apply the latter in Rotterdam to the Machiavellian perspective: I have to hold on to power and to this end I may deceive people, I may lie, I may pretend being friendly, all in order to protect my power. That is Machiavellian.

On the other side of the coin we are developing the Augustinian perspective. There the question is: How far can love play a role in economic transactions and relationships? Here the focus is on allowing others to receive their due through your economic acts or, at least, to be friendly, obliging or kind, to place others in the centre. This does not imply it be done at your own expense, but definitely, as economists express it, that the goal must be a win-win situation--1+1=3.This can be traced back to Augustine much more readily than to Machiavelli. After all, the latter wrote a manual about how you can remain in power for the sake of power and thus for yourself. (It is shocking that this principle was first published by the Vatican, but that's beside the point.) A reformation was definitely needed. Good and false self-love.

Good and False Self-love

De Vries: Actually, Augustine is not familiar with a concept that is comparable to ours about self-interest. He does speak much about self-love

and between those two there is, viewed historically, a direct relationship. With Augustine, self-love has a stoic dimension. According to stoic development theory (*oikeiosis),* everyone is born with a desire for self-preservation. But when you develop yourself, if done properly, you will understand what is really good for you, namely reason, your soul, et cetera. Augustine, under the influence of Plotinus, interprets that to learn the value of your soul before God. Then you realize you stand under God and are called to learn to know God. Genuine self-love is for Augustine to love yourself in God.

But he also knows of a sort of negative self-love. This refers to your preferring yourself above God and your neighbour. This self-love that is prominent especially in the *City of God*, a central theme in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, also begins to penetrate economic theory formation. Bernard Mandeville's idea of private vices and public benefit *(uit—The Fable of the Bees*, 1714, ed.), for example, is really a secularized variant of that negative self-love. One could say, as critics actually do, that within Gereformeerd thought only the negative self-love plays a role. Humans love themselves too much.

With Augustine there is also a positive variant of self-love: to see yourself as a gift and to actualize yourself through grace as a human person as God intends. What you are saying about 1+1=3, Paul, is an illustration of positive self-love. With Augustine, the human person is made for a specific purpose. What you are now

developing in Rotterdam is actually a kind of ethical economy focused on the good. This is not about self-love as a kind of self-promotion as was emphasized in earlier days, but a positive in the Augustinian sense. How can I create a win-win situation in my economic transactions so that I reach my destination through loving the other? That is, I believe what Augustine means by positive self-love: Achieving your destination in loving God and your neighbour. With negative self-love, the traditional point of departure, everything is turned upside down.

Van Geest: You can also apply this to business and management. If I have employees and they are doing well, then they are happy. You used to see that in family businesses in the past. There would be a certain family at the head, but they invested not only in the salaries of the employees but also in their local sports team. Why would they do that? The thought was that if those employees have a good life in their free time, that will in fact promote both their wellbeing and the continuity of the business. Thus win-win is good for me as well as for the other; that goes together intrinsically. But if they had thought that they must enrich ourselves over the backs of the employees, then the cohesion in the business would be disrupted. In Augustinian thought that would be from the evil one.

De Vries: But this has long been the implicit point of departure in economic thought.

Van Geest: Yes, greed is good, according to Gordon Gekko in the film "Wall Street," but

apparently that is not the case. Augustine says in *The City of God* that if you are very wealthy, eventually you will end up in isolation, for you no longer trust anyone; you become apprehensive. That's what happened to Howard Hughes, at one time the wealthiest person on earth. He became apprehensive because he was always isolated and no longer trusted anyone. He completely lost his way. How can I act economically to create a win-win situation so that I reach my destination by loving others? If you always keep in mind the interest of the other without ignoring your own but also without making your own central, then you are in the sphere of Augustine's 1+1=3. Then you do justice to the God-ordained order of things. That is the central focus.

Personal Points to Be Learned

De Vries: That makes me think about what I have learned from *De Doctrina Christiana*, At the beginning of this book Augustine avers that you can only possess knowledge by giving it away. That hit my button. How as teacher do you really come to understand the material? By giving it away. Augustine says, if you don't give it away, then you actually try to keep a public good for yourself, which is a contradiction in terms, for you cannot keep a public good for yourself. When something is true or good or beautiful, then by definition it can be shared. Others can possess it as well without diminishing yours. What's more, you actually become more of a partner through what you give away. The

paradox of "giving is growing" is fundamental for being a teacher, and in fact for all roles in life.

Van Geest: There was something there that hit me like a bomb not only as a scholar but me as Paul. At a certain point, in *De Beata Vita* Augustine appears to embrace a kind of self-help manual about the happy life, the principle of *ne quid nimis* (nothing too much), the stoic principle of moderation. Do everything in moderation! The way in which you do everything in proper moderation in your life, there you find an inner balance. There is a time, according to the Preacher, to sleep, to eat, to be awake, to pray, to weep, to converse with friends and to be alone.

I discovered this at a time I was working and studying unbelievably hard in order to be able to publish as a scholar. That, of course, was important in my career as professor. But then it hit me like a bomb when I struggled against that insight from the Latin text of Augustine. I thought that to be an advice that I myself cannot really take to heart. Can I write about that as a scholar? Then something changed and I thought if my wife says we must eat or go shopping, I should do that even though I may then lose all my brilliant thoughts. Otherwise I did not keep the correct balance between the monk-scholar and the social-loving husband and father. If that balance is lacking and we become immoderate, then we become excessive and can be sure that you will never remain moderate internally. That insight never left me, which, I think, is the reason I am still happily married. Thanks to Augustine.

Old and New Slavery

Van Geest: Geniuses are in a sense timeless. Some texts are naturally complicated, but the basic principles of Augustine are like a mirror. That is precisely what I do with others. For that you do not at all need much hermeneutical jargon. Of course, I do not say to those managers whom I represent things like "Hey, guys, if you had lived in Augustine's time, he would have said this and that to you." That would go too far. But you *can* hold his basic principles before them, something I try as much as possible without moralizing and then they can do with it as they please. That is my tactic.

De Vries: I also think—and this I learned from Gadamer—Augustine has not seen all there is to see. For example, he writes very beautifully that slavery is a product of the fall into sin, but he does not give a single thought to abolishing the entire institution. Today we are able to find reasons for its abolishment in those concepts of creation, fall, and public interest. A certain timelessness is hidden in Augustine's thought; sometimes he does not see it all. Of course the same holds true for us: we don't always see it all either. Others will correct us. This is the nice thing about Augustine: You can take a journey of discovery. He can always surprise and teach you something, even if you don't agree with him.

Van Geest: Your example of slavery is interesting. James O'Donnell, who wrote a commentary on *The Confessions,* said that it is not at all impossible that there were also slaves

doing domestic work in Augustine's monastery. That was a reality for him; he was too much part of his time to challenge the institution. It is something like our inability to separate ourselves from our time sufficiently to say that the big data by which everything becomes transparent leads to big brother watching you. We are not capable of taking a distance to say that it is immoral. That was kind of similar most likely with Augustine when it came to slavery. However, in that context he *does* say that freed slaves have the same rights as free men. From that perspective one can regard him a free thinker within his context.

A Lesson in Humility

De Vries: Augustine was concerned about people who were forced into slavery. How deeply are we involved in the battle against slave-like practices in order to keep our modern economy afloat? Our computers and telephones with which we communicate contain parts that are produced under slave-like circumstances. Moral superiority does not befit us. Augustine teaches us that when you have seen more, you need to love more. And, of course, remain humble.

Van Geest: Of course, cleverness can get you far. You can see that in world history at large as well as in the local football club. But if you as leader develop the *habitus* or life style with the guiding question what kind of conditions you must create to help others come to their rights, then you yourself begin to live a much happier life in your own little world. That, by the way, is also a criteria that Augustine posits in his rule,

the *Praeceptum,* namely do everything in moderation! To the extent you do everything in an appropriate measure, you find an inner balance. The leader of the monastery community must create at least marginal conditions on basis of which every individual comes to maturity.

What is nicer than to have a professor or lecturer in your own small world who has only one single question? It might be what kind of marginal conditions I create both in my lecturing and in my giving guidance in my dissertation so that the student really benefits? This is in place of "O, I have to give that lecture and that bothers me, for I really want to write that grand moving Nobel prize book." If that's the life style you develop, then you are on the wrong side in the competition. It is not about you; it is about you as creator of marginal conditions in order to help an individual and community to achieve an orderly and satisfying life. If you succeed here, then as leader you create a difference and make people thankful. But does leadership have to do with power, pride and baboon-like behaviour? That generally is the reality, but I nevertheless find it realistic to continue to uphold the image of Augustine, even though you are aware that this ideal will never become the reality. Augustine himself knew that.

De Vries: He was indeed very aware of that. But if you think of the virtue of humility as respecting your borders, I suspect every manager would understand that. We really have a burn-out culture—and why? One of the reasons is that we constantly cross our borders. I suspect that many

managers are conscious of the fact that there are limits to what you can accomplish. In a certain way, humility means respecting those borders. Pride, on the other hand, amounts to wanting to accomplish too much: *I want it all and I want it now*. You need to respect the borders of your various relationships in order to bloom as parent, partner, employee or employer. Augustine teaches this in his idea of *ordo amaris*, the order of love.

Van Geest: I want to add to this that it is never a matter of just black or white. Of course, you have eros—I want to be read; I want to do something that shows me up; I want to be the architect who plans a nice building or the PhD student who writes that book. You want to add something and that has to do with the power to create. But, says Augustine, that must be embedded in the *caritas*, in love for God and neighbour. You don't need to suppress the eros. You do it because your product can improve the world. That must be your disposition in its deepest sense. The eros of the urge to create must be embedded in love and not the other way around, for then it goes in the direction of *superbia* or pride.

Augustine as Political Philosopher

A leader must always be humble. He should not be asking how long I can remain in power, but, rather, how do I create the basic conditions by which those entrusted to my care can lead an orderly and satisfactory life. They will still not be perfectly happy, but at least it is a good foundation. The leader who wants to be a leader

for his own sake, will develop dictatorial characteristics. And from dictatorship and tyranny, according to Augustine—how realistic do you want it stated?—you get war. From a proud leader who will not allow disagreement, it is a small step to war. That is a very central principle in the political philosophy of Augustine, I have to resist devoting a column to the fact that Putin is one of so any examples that tyranny and dictatorship always lead to war.

Much has been written about the political philosophy of Augustine. The bottom line is that in the dimension of time and space, you should believe no one who promises to make you perfectly happy. When politicians promise you golden mountains, then one thing is sure: They will not fulfill those promises. In time and space everything is transitory and so unpredictable that you are happy one moment but the next moment you lose all your possessions. Thus do not assume that politics can bring you happiness via any kind of plan, like a caring state. Impossible. That is a basic point in Augustine's political philosophy.

De Vries: Somewhere in *The City of God*, Augustine writes that the Roman Peace Gate, that stood open in times of peace, perhaps stood open a mere six years during all that history of 800 years. That is an illustration of how the *libido dominandi*, the lust to dominate, always leads to the urge to expand, to war and misery. In this respect, humility leads to cooperation and to the acceptance of borders. That is indeed realistic:

can you accept the borders of your country or not?

Van Geest: The entire *City of God* is indeed written against the background of the dissolution of the Roman Empire. In the year 410 AD, the entire Roman Empire collapsed like a deck of cards or with the speed of an avalanche. Simply nothing was left of it. The crisis of 2008 was nothing compared to it, for we kept living in houses, but in Rome even these had disappeared. The Romans accused the Christians, who in the meantime had gained more power than ever before, that it was their fault, because they had preferred a loser on the cross. If you are rich, how can you possibly remain in power if you prefer a criminal on the cross? That must lead to a mistake somewhere along the line. The problem of a weak leader is that he plunges an entire business into misery. That's what the Romans accused Christian of. Augustine reacted vigorously and said that if only you were all born as Christians, if the times were only Christian, then we would have absorbed the spirit of Christ, the spirit of the virtue of humility. Humility, i. e., the ability to relativize your own ambitions in the light of your ultimate goal to see others happy, is the medicine that Christendom in principle can offer the world.

To Believe Is to Be Vulnerable:

St. Augustine on Skepticism[3]

By Aaron Ebert

Is there anything we can know with certainty? How should we react to the flood of fake news and false promises that attack us from every direction? Can skepticism be true? Aaron Ebert reflects on such questions and proposes that Augustine's life-long struggles with skepticism can teach us useful lessons today in the search for the good life.

What can we know for sure? Which and whose news reports can we believe? Moscow tells us one thing; the *New York Times*, another; Fox News, still a third (1). In the era of deep fake, "video images from eye witnesses" are even less trustworthy than second-hand reports. E-mail scams that appear to come from reliable sources hack our bank accounts. Famous artworks are copied and subsequently passed on as originals under false pretenses. Medical doctors and scientists compete with each other for our acceptance of the so-called "hard facts" of science. The documentary "The Social Dilemma" has demonstrated that even the omniscient Google does not base itself on objective knowledge so much as on our desires and on the wallets of others. On many universities the skepticism has such a strong hold that we are told that all truth claims are mere masks for the will to power. Truth is nothing more than your cultural perspective or prejudice. It feels as if we are floating around on a tempestuous sea of doubt and uncertainty.

[3] Original title: "Geloven is kwetsbaar zijn: Augustinus over skepticism."

Can we be certain of anything? This is not a new question; it is as old as philosophy itself. In ancient times the philosophers known as Academici, members of Plato's Academy with Carneades (213-129 BC) as their leader, were of the opinion that we can know nothing with certainty and therefore we should not agree on anything (*assensio).* Put this way, the position of these academics sounded simple, but this was a clever opinion and attracted many adherents, among them the greatest of all Latin writers, Cicero. This opinion emerged from the experience of deep and irreconcilable differences of opinion. How could there exist so many different and irreconcilable philosophical opinions if the knowledge of truth was really achievable? The philosophers, they who devoted their lives to the search for truth and wisdom, should certainly be able to find some agreement if sure knowledge were possible. Skepticism seemed the only reasonable alternative, while it also took on the form of epistemological humility. Who am I to claim that I have knowledge of the truth while there is so much disunity?

Augustine's Obligation to Skepticism

Augustine came in touch with skepticism at a crucial moment in his life. When he was about thirty years of age, he was already a successful professor of rhetoric with a rapidly developing reputation, but he was also deeply unhappy. In a certain sense he had a mid-life crisis at thirty.

For more than a decade, Augustine associated with the Manicheans, a semi-Christian religious sect that claimed to teach a certain form of the Christian faith by means of reason alone—without appealing to any other

authority. He had fundamental questions about the nature of God and the meaning of human life. No one seemed able to answer these questions. When even the great Manichean Faustus could not satisfactorily solve these questions, the questions led to a general doubt. He wrote: “The thought occurred also to me that the philosophers called “academici” were more careful and wiser than the others. They held that we must doubt everything; their judgement was that not a single truth can be known to humans” (2).

Disillusioned by the unsolvable differences of opinion among philosophers and religious groups, Augustine began to doubt all things and swung back and forth between all opinions. He decided to leave Manicheism but saw no need to “entrust the healing of the sickness of my soul to the academici, since among them the name of Christ, the source of health, was lacking. Hence I decided to remain a catechumen in the Catholic Church, as recommended by my parents, till some kind of certainty would emerge on basis of which I could determine my course” (3).

Within two years Augustine would make himself available for baptism by Ambrosius. Already before that time he had rejected the central tenets of skepticism, but still deeply remained an adherent, for it had freed him from the philosophical and religious swamp of Manicheism. The possibility of doubt, radical doubt even, had opened his spirit for other possibilities, one of which proved to be Christianity! Skepticism had helped his conversion to the Church. Nevertheless, Augustine’s later writing about skepticism would always carry the ambiguity of this original meeting. According to him, though skepticism fails as an epistemology, it is correct at certain points.

Augustine's Rebuttal of Skepticism

Given the fact that the Academici played a role in Augustine's transition from Manicheism to the status of Catholic catechumen, is it not surprising that the first work he wrote after his conversion was *Contra Academicos?* He had to give an account of what he was giving up in their philosophy and why.

The kernel of his rebuttal is that skepticism is inherently incoherent, i.e., the doctrine is undermined by their practice. The Academici claimed that we must not agree with anything, because we cannot know anything with certainty. But, asks Augustine, should we then agree with the point of the Academici that we must agree with nothing? Do they think their own standpoint *is* true? It must be so, for they invite other people to accept it. But if their own is true, namely that we should accept nothing because nothing can definitely be known as true, then *their* philosophical opinions are also caught up in their own denial. They would have to teach that we should not agree with their opinion, because we cannot know whether or not it is true (5).

Augustine's rebuttal of skepticism is also relevant as rebuttal of contemporary perspectivism. Going back to Nietzsche, perspectivism claims that there exists no ultimate truth behind any of our various perspectives. There is only yours, mine and that of all others. The goal of those who talk about truth is in reality that they want to impose their own perspective on others. This is another reason to ask with suspicion what is their interest behind their truth claim. We could ask on basis of Augustine's critique of Academici, who is

pushing this perspectivism? What is their interest? If perspectivism should, ironically enough, be true, then there is no more basis for moral judgement. There is only my perspective and yours, but without any way to choose between them. The only thing we can do is to report which standpoint represents the majority. What is the political interest behind this standpoint? These are complex issues. It would be foolish to think that there are simple solutions, but Augustine can at least help us to see through the incoherence of this way of thinking.

Augustine's Turn about Skepticism

But still…. In spite of Augustine's energetic and definite rejection of skepticism, he was not prepared to simply bury it. He retained an awareness that something was right. If perspectivism is true, there is no further basis for a moral judgement. Why? We find the beginning of an answer in *The City of God*, where he writes about the fall into sin and the inescapable misery of human life.

In the last book in *The City of God*, Augustine focuses on the gifts for this life that God gives to both the good and the bad. But he is so disenchanted by the evil of this life that the suggestion of attraction to the goods of this life immediately diverts his attention to the tsunami of calamity that threatens us. The succeeding paragraphs make the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes look almost cheerful. They can be summarized in Augustine's concluding declaration, "This life is miserable as hell."

Important for our understanding of Augustine's opinions about skepticism is that in this litany of evils

he takes up the issue of being deceived. He writes, "We remain on our post in uninterrupted vigilance and we guard against any fake truth or clever discourse misleading us and against any dark cloud of error enveloping us (6). Apparent truths, deceiving words, errors that pretend to be the truth—we are constantly harassed with these and cannot avoid them in this life. .

But deceit is deeper and older than our current experience. It depends on the *source* of evil. "When the devil turned away from God, he was both misleading and deceitful—*falsus et fallax.* For who refuses to hold on to what is real or does not try in his self-glorifying pride to simulate something that is unreal?"[4]—*simulare quod non est* (7). Here, with the entry of death into the world, we find deceit, falsehood and apparent goods that are not real goods. In subsequent books, Augustine discusses how this poison of deceit oozes throughout the earthly city, the very city in which we all are born by nature. Our lives are surrounded by misleadings, simulations and lies, for the one who is *falsus and fallax* goes around like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore we cannot exclude the possibility of deceit in the midst of this life until the Lord returns and destroys all cleverness and deceit.

Perhaps I should say that in this life we cannot exclude the possibility of deceit without incurring an even deeper wound. Here we have returned to the subject of skepticism. The alternative to life with the possibility of deceit is not to agree with anything, to encapsulate yourself in a permanent state of unbelief, so that you cannot be deceived. C. S. Lewis once wrote about the heart that "to love at all is to be vulnerable." This

[4]See footnote 1.

appears to be true also for our mind. To believe is to be vulnerable. In this life believing means to expose yourself to the possibility of deceit. After all, you can never know with certainty whether what you believe is true. You *can* seek understanding—*fides quaerens intellectum*--, but understanding what you belief is never complete in this life. However, the alternative of locking your spirit in the casket of skepticism and not to agree with anything, is even worse. Perhaps you will not be misled in that state of lonesome incarceration, but eventually you run the risk of not being able to believe anymore and thus to lose out on the Truth who brings us to our Father's house where love is righteous and without deceit.

As far as I can see, the above is the little spark of truth that Augustine saw in his initial meeting up with skepticism. Through decades of the pastorate, of civic obligation and of a deepening of self-knowledge, Augustine became increasingly aware of the powers of noetic darkness. Misleading is woven into the very fabric of the earthly city. Though Augustine would eventually point out a path that deviated radically from skepticism, he never let go his awareness of skepticism with its somber view on the possibility of a human rational response to truth about the character of our fallen existence: In this world as we experience it, untruth and error are unavoidable possibilities. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). This is what the young Joseph Ratzinger called "the decisive twist that Augustine threw at the problem of the Academici" (8).

Conclusion

I think that Augustine's life-long struggle with the problem of skepticism encompasses two important lessons for our search for the good life.

First, skepticism ultimately undermines itself. Augustine helps us to dismantle the truth claims of skepticism and perspectivism. If it is indeed true that there is no truth, that *is* one overriding truth. Thus he helps us to posit the question about truth anew in a philosophically responsible manner.

Secondly, and this is perhaps even more important, Augustine shows that we cannot exclude the potential of being misled. Being deceived is our fate east of Eden. That is an important word for all of us, for the apparent truth, deceitful words, error that parades as truth—our lives are constantly harassed by these and we cannot avoid them in this life. Skepticism can ban the tragedy of being misled only by also banning the possibility of deliverance. Just like Lewis'dwarfs in *The Last Battle*, if we refuse principially to allow ourselves to be taken in, we can discover that we have rejected being taken in through that which our heart longs for the most, namely, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

For we all feel in one way or another the threat of deceit in pseudo-reality, whether on the internet, at work or in our most intimate relationships. To be sure, Augustine is no proponent of blind credibility, but he sees a problem that is much more serious than that of deception, such as being taken in by false news, being fooled by email fraud, purchasing a false artwork, believing in a false medical report or being deceived by the manipulative suggestions of Google, just to return to the example with which we began. The deeper

problem is the attempt to make yourself invulnerable. Augustine urges that it is much better to run the risk of being deceived by the news or to be misled by the knowledge of having a wrong opinion, then to take the principial decision to believe nothing.

In the midst of the trials of this life, Augustine gives us a sober but hopeful stimulation: Let us take the risk of believing even though we can be misled, so that we not lose our ability to believe in the good, the beautiful and the true.

NOTES:

I have only partially translated the endnotes.

Aaron Ebert is a post-graduate student in early Christianity at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. To my chagrin as translator from
Dutch into English, the Dutch is a translation from the original English! I could have saved me a lot of effort, but the information escaped me till it was done.

1 U kunt ongetwijfeld een Nederlandse equivalent vinden van nieuwskanalen die over een vrijwel andere wereld verslag lijken te doen.
2 Augustinus, *Confessions,* vertaling Gerard Wijdeveld (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1997), 112 (5.10.19).
3 Ibid., 117 (5.14.25).
4 Tegen de Academici, 3.10.22.
5 *The City of God,* 22.22 (mijn vertaling). Noot van de vertaler: als er staat “mijn vertaling” is het Ebert’s vertaling van de brontekst. Ik heb geprobeerd Ebert’s vertaling zo goed mogelijk weer te geven.
6 Ibid., 22.23 (mijn vertaling).
7 Ibid., 11.13 (mijn vertaling).
8 Joseph Ratzinger, Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche, in Münchener Theologische Studien: II. Systematische Abteilung, Band 7, ed. Franz Xaver Seppelt et. al. (München: Karl Zink Verlag, 1954), 13 (mijn vertaling).

Against Imperialism: The Significance of Augustine's

Philosophy for Politics[5]

By Roel Kuiper[6]

There are few Christian thinkers who have had as much influence on Western political thought like Augustine. At the same time, Augustine's most important political work, *The City of God*, does not deal directly with politics. Roel Kuiper gives us a tour through that book in a search for Augustine's political message.

Did the church father Aurelius Augustine have a political philosophy?(1) Hannah Arendt, who read and re-read Augustine throughout her life, calls Augustine's book *The City of God* his most important political publication. However, she considers his ideas about the human quest for eternal happiness unsuitable as a basis for political action. To be honest, except for *The City of God* and its often quoted 19th book, we find little about his political philosophy in his writings. His thoughts about politics and statehood appear only here and there in passing, as incidental.(2) Anyone who pays attention to the character of *The City of God* must observe that politics is not its primary concern, but rather the virtuous life in an eternal order governed by God. The book is about religion, history, morality and culture, not about politics.

Can Christianity and political power support each other?

Nevertheless, *The City of God* has had great political influence. Medieval emperors had the book read to

[6] Original title: "Tegen het Imperialisme: Over de betekenis van Augustinus' Filosofie voor de Politiek."

them. Especially the image of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, that exist against each other, next to each other and through each other, has stimulated political thought. Also influential is the notion that Christians live in the world and have the task to contribute to earthly peace, while they simultaneously are also strangers with a focus on heaven and eternal life. With Calvin, this is echoed in the distinction between a civil and spiritual domain in human society.(3) 21st-century Christians who base their political involvement on Jeremiah 29, a chapter that speaks about seeking the peace of the city, point implicitly and sometimes explicitly to Augustine.

However, it should be noted that *The City of God* ***was*** inspired by politics. The occupation and the pillaging of the "eternal city," Rome, by Alarik in 410, nearly a century after Constantine the Great had become the first Christian emperor, set into motion doubt whether Christianity was capable of supporting the Roman empire. Was the demise of the empire not blamed on rejecting the Roman gods?(4) Would Christianity with its pacifistic message appear powerful enough to counter the attacks on Rome? Was it not time to revert to the former era with its Roman state cultus of the empire's gods? Was it not the traditional Roman virtues that formed the foundation for the success of the empire? The doubt that arose was a political doubt that touched upon the question whether the political establishment could survive the storms of world history.

Political instability and genuine happiness

Augustine's considerations address this political instability. They also address and critique along with it

a current way of thinking about politics in which everything must focus on the preservation of the empire. In this perspective having and holding power is the prevalent attitude. According to Augustine, this conservative opinion neither guaranteed stability nor the good life, for throughout this reality there was much evil, ugly violence and all sorts of injustice. The so-called Roman virtues, namely their lust for heroism and public glory, were in fact weak pillars. The Roman Empire was not kept together by justice or rights, but by self-love and self-glorification (*amor sui).* Augustine turns the question about political stability inside out and addresses a deeper existential question: Where do we find genuine happiness?

The experiences that inspired Augustine's considerations could just as well be ours. For the modern people of the West, accustomed to the *Pax Americana* of the previous century, the feeling of instability is increasing. The golden post-war years of the 20th century were years of prosperity and material happiness. Twenty years ago, after the collapse of Communism, in conservative circles in the United States it was still possible to write with self-assurance, "America is Rome, committed as it is to the preservation and extension of an empire."(5) Since then, this image has been tilted. It is clear that the U.S. is no longer the only superpower in the world. The safety of the European continent is no longer without its threats. The same holds true for Western welfare. Westerners of the 21st century are worried just like the Romans in the fifth century.

Asking for true human happiness in these circumstances looks like shifting attention to a terrain outside of politics. Anyone with modern ears who

hears that the state is not a "happiness machine," will think that we are sidetracked. This was not the case with Augustine and his contemporaries. The happiness of citizens was tied to the lot of Rome—that was the current thought. Happiness was the main goal of the Stoics, who had their own emperor in Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD). The Stoics in the days of Augustine still were always talking about happiness as the ideal of a conscientious life. Happiness was to be reached by self-restraint and by a political system. They also spoke of a "city of God," a cosmopolis. This could be achieved on earth if people lived virtuously according to the prescriptions of nature. Earthly happiness was within reach as a political ideal,(6) one that was closely tied to life in a strong Roman empire.

Augustine must have recognized the totalitarian nature of this kind of imperialistic thinking that, just like Western thought, could entirely dominate the strivings of its citizens. He resists the thought that there is only one kind of nation suitable for living and that must be supported by all powers. The idea of two cities breaks up this image, relativizes earthly power, separates religion and state and opens other perspectives on politics. The two cities or communities each have their own idea of happiness. They love different things and thus have different orientations. For Christians, the heavenly "city of God" is the standard for what must be called justice or the "highest good" on earth. That "highest good" is ultimately eternal life with its own form of peace and happiness. This means that earthly cities and empires with their temporary forms of peace and happiness are of an ephemeral nature. This also held for Rome.

The State Is Not the Source of Happiness

The City of God has sometimes been described as an apologetic document to defend an attacked Christianity. It can just as easily be read as a warning to Christians not to expect too much from politics. Happiness does not come from the state. Earthly power is short-lived. At the same time, Augustine does not reject the existing political order. It is important to serve earthly peace and to honour the documents that support it. Augustine before his time here clears the way for influential voices from the early church, namely the voices of the church fathers Tertullius and Eusebius. Tertullius (160-230 AD) is the source of the sharp declaration that Christians have no business with public affairs. Eusebius of Caesarea (263-329 AD) regarded the Christian emperor as support for Christ on earth with a divine mission (7). Augustine rejects both and attempts to show how Christians are to relate to others in their society, also when they occupy a public office or enter the arena of politics.

Herewith Augustine presents a completely new approach to politics. It is about the functioning of a society, about tolerance and civic duty, about striving for the good. Some of his works are said to be far ahead of their time. That also holds for *The City of God*, which is most likely the reason this work belongs to the body of world literature and Augustine is still being read. The themes he introduces touch upon the central concerns of every political system. The book could be read as a protest against every form of the ideologizing of politics, against the revolutionary glorification of power or, more precisely, against imperialism. He posits the Gospel over against that imperialism. He is sharp when he reminds the Romans that they ran after demons in their old cultus of the

state. At this point the two cities are diametrically opposed to each other. The two orientations, namely the love of God and the love of humans and their demons, exclude each other.

The Search for the Political: Next to and Mixed with Each Other

Which political consequences does Augustine draw from his approach? Does it amount to a political philosophy? Let us examine that in terms of a few political themes. I am thinking about these: forms of states and political institutions, bearing political responsibility, the role of religion in the public domain and dealing with rights and justice, including the rights of minorities.

As to the first of these themes, nowhere does *The City of God* give a Biblical vision on the forms of states or on the role and meaning of political institutions. He deals with many Bible passages, but there is no mention of Roman 13, where the government is called an institution of God. He *does* say somewhere that the power and continuity of the Roman Empire was to be attributed to divine providence, but the interest and significance that Calvin and Luther attach to government as a divine institution is altogether lacking (8). Thus, he does not ask about the task of government as a divine institution. Well, yes, in general he does point to the obligation of the authorities to practice justice, but he does not delve into this issue. The image of the two cities relativizes earthly power, separates religion from state and opens other perspectives on politics. The interest and meaning that Calvin and Luther attribute to the state as a divine institution is totally lacking with Augustine. It is often

a striving “in hope” and not “on the ground,” even for Christian emperors. We do not find in Augustine the declaration that God’s commandments hold for both the spiritual and civil terrains, as Calvin posits later in his Institutions. That sort of pronouncements about a government that holds God’s commandments high in public life is too much for him. At this point there is no clear political philosophy.

The same holds for public life. For Calvin and later Christian thinkers, Christians are seen as part of civil society. Christians have a responsibility to bear there. With Augustine, this is a question, an option. Public life is supported by people who, in addition to caring for their household (*oikos*), are occupied with the communal affairs of the city (*res publica* or *polis).* Here the existence of the two cities next to each other is drawn, involvement in public affairs is not incumbent, though Augustine recognizes that people can be called into it. Christians, however, do not focus on that; their love is directed to God and their true happiness in the future. That makes them *use* the world rather than see it as object of their love. Here we meet up with the well-known distinction between use (*util)* and enjoyment (*frui)*. There is a certain reserve with respect to political life. Christian use the earthly peace for another goal:, namely eternal happiness that is found elsewhere. This is where the critique of Hannah Arendt comes in, who was already tracing this tension in her dissertation about *Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* from 1929 (9). However, her critique is too strong when she accuses Christians that they, in their search for peace for the city and for creation, are focused especially eschatologically and see the world as a mere tool for their use (10). Political awareness after

Augustine had been strengthened at this point. When today's Christians speak of peace for the city, they mean "shalom," rather than a balanced order of rest (11).

Focusing on the third theme, we see in Augustine a striking tolerance for multiple religion in the public domain. Though Christianity became the religion of the Empire a century earlier, Augustine found that it should not be the only religion in control. This church father was definitely no theocrat (12). However sharp his condemnation of pagan religions and Roman gods—he calls them straight out "evil, unclean demons"—he does not favour a ban on other religions. He acknowledges that public life is the terrain of everyone. That flows forth out of his concept of earthly peace, as an overlapping terrain for Christians with their orientation on the city of God and others with their orientation on the earthly city. The two cities are intertwined. Christians ought not to dominate, for that could become their form of imperialism. Put stronger, it must suffice for Christians when they are in agreement with non-Christians to form an earthly peace together "in so far as this is possible without attacking piety and religion" (13). Thus, Augustine does not claim any special rights and certainly not a monopoly of rights or even a privileged position for Christians, a relatively liberal form of freedom of religion. When it comes to religion in the public domain, he is strikingly generous and we find here a political philosophy that is far ahead of his time.

Justice and Power

Finally, let us pay some attention to the theme of justice. During the course of a long Western history,

modern Christians are accustomed to place justice above power. A healthy politics promotes a public order of justice. Herman Dooyeweerd saw striving for public justice as the centre for Christian politics. These accents are hardly there in Augustine (14). That is a striking omission, especially for one who would like to hear more about Augustine's opinions about the political system. In its place, he pays more attention to a stumbling order of justice, with judges who just cannot arrive at a correct sentence, as well as with political authorities who do not have justice as their mainspring. He even goes as far as to say that there exists no Roman nation if the definition were that the society is kept together by unanimity about justice. There is no such unanimity, for there is no unanimous concept of justice when people do not serve God (15). Here we stumble onto Augustine's famous skepticism with respect to people and their ability to do the good. The political system is a ball of acts and motives, a mixture of justice and power. In the hands of the powerful, this can easily derail, something that happens frequently. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that justice needs to rank above power, but we do not find a positive expectation with respect to a just political order. We read instead about mistrust of power. We do see him in this situation promoting the church's own position and, strikingly, a kind of justice for minorities. He defended the North African Punic language and its use in addition to the dominant Latin (16). As bishop of the church, he defended social liberties as we later see among Christians who raise their voices in the political arena.

A Political Philosophy?

As to the question whether Augustine had a political philosophy, with some reservation we can give an affirmative response. It was a philosophy with reserve concerning public life and with a clearly expressed fear for the power of the Roman empire which, as we can see from the past, could adopt absolutistic characteristics. He certainly did not support a Christian emperor cult and feared the dynamics of power that exists for its own glory. His political philosophy was directed against imperialism that was corrupted with all sorts of evil and that needed an external state religion.

We do not find a political programme or reflections about justice or statehood in *The City of God.* However, there are all sorts of ideas that later would be given political interpretations. Augustine was far ahead of his time with his attention for morality in public life, for a politics that gave justice priority over power, and for tolerance and religious freedom in a pluralistic society. The political society has to be satisfied with a temporary earthly peace. That peace is not without value, but it points to the future of eternal peace and genuine happiness. People who search for that happiness would do well to direct their earthly desires to the city of God, where all human longings will ultimately be fulfilled.

NOTES

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1 Hannah Arendt, Vita Activa, Boom 1994, p. 175.

2 Zie de observatie van A. Sizoo, Augustinus over den staat, Kok 1947, p. 9: “Een werk dat opzettelijk handelt over dat onderwerp [de staat] heeft Augustinus niet geschreven”.

3 With Luther there is a distinction between two kingdoms, those of the church and of politics. That distinction does not coincide with Augustine’s two cities, though it is frequently attributed unjustly to him.

4 The complaint about Christian pacifism came from Rufius Volusianus, the proconsul of Africa. It was put to Augustine two years after the sack of Rome. Zie: Robert Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine, Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 215.

5 Andrew J. Bacevich, American Empire, Harvard University Press 2002, p. 244: “America is Rome, committed to the maintenance and expansion of an empire”.

6 Vgl. Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Penguin 1981, p. 18.

7 Meer hierover in: J. van Oort, Jeruzalem en Babylon: Een onderzoek van Augustinus’ De Stad van God en de bronnen van zijn leer der twee steden (rijken), Boekencentrum 1995, p. 131.

8 Augustinus, De stad van God, boek V, 21.

9 Vgl. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: Een biografie, Atlas 2005, pp. 137-139 en 616-627.

10 Een variant op dit verwijt geeft Hannah Arendt in Vita Activa, p. 313 e.v.

11 I cannot develop this further, but I am aiming at the work of, among others, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Miroslav Wolf, in whom the striving for “shalom” is a motive for Christian political action.

12 Zie hierover: J. van Oort, Jeruzalem en Babylon: Een onderzoek van Augustinus’ De Stad van God en de bronnen van zijn leer der twee steden (rijken), Boekencentrum 1995, p. 77, p. 129 e.v.

13 Augustinus, De stad van God, boek XIX, 17.

14 O’Donovan merkt op: “justice is not at the forefront of Augustine’s concerns”. Zie Oliver O’Donovan & Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present, Eerdmans 2004, p. 63.

15 Augustinus, De stad van God, boek XIX, 21. Augustine will later say that there is a Roman nation if you delete the work “justice” and a people is defined as “united ownership of things they love”: boek XIX, 24.

16 Ik ontleen dit voorbeeld aan James Eglinton, ‘Let Every Tongue Confess. Language Diversity and Reformed Public Theology’, in: Matthew Kaemingh, Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for Life in the World. Baker Academic 2021, p. 46.

Naked and without Shame? Augustine on Sexuality[7]

By Mathijs Lamberigts

During the second Pelagian controversy (418-430 AD), Augustine places a heavy emphasis on human desire in general and especially on that of sexuality. He propounds that sexuality does not belong to the essence of marriage. Mathijs Lamberigts makes it clear that this view of sexuality is the result of Augustine's historical reading of the fall and his conviction that the entire human race descended from one person, Adam.

Augustine's vision on sexuality has always been the subject of heavy criticism. For example, Uta Ranke-Heinemann begins her chapter on Augustine with the following statement: "The man who melted the hostility against sexuality and lust into a systematic unity with Christianity, was the greatest of all church fathers, namely, the holy Augustine" (Ranke-Heinemann 1990, p. 66). It is a heavy accusation that explains that because of Augustine's vision and its reception by many into the 20th century, sexuality is experienced as problematic, even within marriage (Dupont, Francois, van Geest, Lamberigts 2013). Sexuality can be accepted only with an eye towards propagation within the context of a legal marriage. Sexual enjoyment was unacceptable till deep into the 20th century, even in the Catholic tradition. He is, however, also the man of grace, peace, love and of social compassion. She has a definite point when she writes that Augustine delivered an unusual religious monastic contribution to western hostility against sex.

Already during his lifetime, Augustine's vision on sexuality was the subject of critique. Bishop Julianus of

[7] Original title: "Naakt en zonder schaamte."

Aeclanum (+/- 380-454 AD) accused him that his vision of sexuality as a sinful desire in fact was a critique of God's work of creation. After all, the Bishop argued, God is the Creator of both body and soul. While humans were co-creators in propagating at the bodily level, God is the only Creator of the soul, which is exactly the level where sin and sinfulness are situated. Furthermore, God has given the human race the command to propagate and to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28). Propagation requires sexuality. Julianus had been married himself and knew that without sexual desire nothing happens. Sexuality belongs to our created nature, is intrinsically good and a condition for procreation. Sexuality an sich did not deserve to be condemned, but the way people dealt with it. For Julianus, sexuality had a positive place within marriage with an eye to propagation.

It has to be said: Julianus experienced a youth very different from that of Augustine. He was the son of a bishop and married the daughter of another bishop. At the occasion of his wedding, the married bishop Paulinus of Nola wrote a marriage song (*epithalamium*) that clearly expresses great expectations from the young couple and where discussing a possible family was no problem.

Augustine's youth was of a different order. He had a girlfriend already during his student years. Out of that relationship in 371/372 AD, when he was still a teenager, an unwanted but very promising son was born (*Confessions 4.2.2).* Even though he remained faithful to his girlfriend for many years and she followed him to Milan, she was sent away, for she stood in the way of a marriage to a woman of his own social status. That woman was a young girl who had

not yet reached a marriageable age. Thus Augustine had to wait two more years before he could marry. However, he could not live without sex and therefore sought another woman with whom to share his bed, even though he experienced the departure of his girlfriend to Africa as very painful. He admitted that his earlier girlfriend would never be able to have another man (*Confessions* 4.2.2). It never came to a marriage with that young girl, for in the meantime he read Romans 13:13-14: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Reading this text made everything clear to him. He no longer sought a woman for his sexual desires and no longer had any expectations of this world (*Confessions* 8.12.29-30). His conversion caused a farewell to a personal sexual life (Brown, 1988).

Naked and without Shame

In Augustine's discussions about sexuality, Adam's fall into sin and its results have played a prominent role. In Genesis 2:25 we read that the first human beings were naked but felt no shame for each other. In Genesis 3:7 it is said after the fall, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sowed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." He read the story of the fall as real history in which the pre-fall situation was idealized. The first people, Adam and his wife, Eve, are good creatures, created by a good Creator. Adam was created out of dust and Eve out of a rib of Adam. This indicates the fundamental unity of the human race: All are

Adam's progeny. Adam possessed a soul that would lead the body.

The first person's nature was healthy and created without blemish. He knew no sickness or inconvenience, no pain or suffering, no exhaustion. Living in the presence of the tree of life, he did not suffer the inconveniences of age. His most important task was to guard and work the paradise in which he as farmer could constantly contemplate the divine with pleasure and without exertion (*Genesi ad litteram,* 8.8-9*)*. This was all to happen in accordance with God's will and in absolute obedience to Him. Adam was created after God's image and likeness, the reason he, in contrast to animals, walked upright (*De genesi contra Manichaeos,* 1:28). Intellectually, he was perfect, for he named all things (*De Genesi ad litteram,* 2.19). His mind superceded that of all other people as a bird supercedes a turtle in speed (*Opus imperfectum,* 5.1). Adam was created a morally perfect man, bestowed with a free will in order to live uprightly (*De natura et gratia,* 50). Because he was created upright, focused on God's will, he could easily keep God's commandments (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione,* 1,68). In addition, the body obeyed the soul perfectly before the fall. Adam and Eve were given the task to grow and to propagate themselves (Genesis 1:28).

Originally, Augustine thought, propagation took place at the spiritual level. Physical propagation was thought to be the result of the fall (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.30). He withdrew this vision (*Retractationes* 1.10.2) and in *De genesi ad litteram* 9.6 and 9.9 he defended the notion that Adam and Eve in Paradise could pair up with an eye to propagation without involving sexual longing. He regarded

harmonious sexuality, i.e., perfectly controllable sexuality, and propagation as apart of the essence of mankind. Adam and his wife were naked and were not ashamed. This for Augustine was proof that sinful desire (*de concupiscentia carnis)* was absent before the fall (compare *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,36).

Thus, Augustine made a distinction between sexuality and propagation. For him, propagation without sexual desire was quite possible. It was only during his controversy with Julianus that he left open the possibility for sexual desire in Paradise, on condition that it be completely subject to human reason and will (*Contra duas epistulas pelagianorum* 1.34; *Contra Iulianum* 4.57; *Opus imperfectum* 1.68). If Adam and Eve had not sinned, their biological body-- which was the reason they needed to eat, a point at which they did not differ from mankind today—would have morphed over time into a spiritual body and they would thus be immortal (Bonner 1986-1994).

The Fall and Its Terrible Consequences

On basis of the foregoing, it is difficult to understand why Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Augustine did not answer the reason for the fall (Lamberigts, 2021). He does insist that Adam's sin was the result of pride. Adam preferred self-love to love for God (Sermo 96. 2). Adam was led astray by Eve, but he did not want to lose her, even if this meant sin (*De civitate Dei* 14. 11). Committing sin in a situation where he was not bothered by a single weakness, made his offence even worse (*De civitate Dei* 14. 12). In addition, Adam did not show any remorse but pushed the harmonius sexuality as Augustine regarded it, i.e., perfect and

controllable sexuality, and propagation as the essence of mankind, onto Eve (Genesis 3:12), though he himself was the first human being and the patriarch of all. Because Adam was the first human being and the source of human life, most of the weight of the fall is to be attributed to him.

Adam was banned from Paradise. Separated from the tree of life, physical suffering and death became his lot. Adam's disobedience over against God resulted in disobedience of the world of the flesh against the human spirit. More, Adam would have to suffer eternal death, if Christ had not saved him. Because of his rebellion against God, he ended up with the loss of control over his body. Sexual desire escaped the control of reason and even rebelled against this reason: it no longer obeyed the human will without challenges. Sexual desire arises even if people do not want it. It is absent, even when it is wanted. It leads its own life and seeks it own way. This disharmony is a part of the greater catastrophe in which war, violence, suffering and pain, greed and pride, entered into the human world. In that sense, for Augustine all longing of the flesh that counters the desires of the spirit is negative. It may be about taking revenge, excessive gathering of money, striving after fame, etc. (*De civitate Dei* 14, 15). In other words, sinful desire is broader than sexual desire. It is an expression of a certain opposition between the flesh and the spirit that is experienced in the human soul (Lamberigts 2012-2018).

Marriage and Sexuality after the Fall

As bishop, Augustine has written much about marriage and sexuality. He regarded the existence of genders and families, sex and human fertility as part and parcel

of God's work of creation and called them a "natural good." The desire for marriage belongs to human nature, is focused on propagation and is thus completely in line with God's plan of salvation. In the controversy with Julianus, Augustine distinguished the evil of sexuality with the good of marriage (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.1.1; 1.7.8; 1.8.9). The three good things of marriage are faithfulness, propagation and the marriage bond. In propagation God's plan for history and the possibility to realize it become clear (Lamberigts 2000). The desire to have children is, according to Augustine, perfectly legitimate and honourable and is compared by him to longing for good health (*De nuptiis et conscupiscentia* 2.17).

In his work *De bono coniugali* (About the good of marriage), Augustine poses as a defendant of marriage. He is in dialogue wkith the monk Jovianianus (died +/- 405 AD), who regarded marriage and being baptized in the virginal state on equal niveau, a reaction against what he regarded as exaggerated praise of virginhood. In reaction to the latter, Hieronymus (+/- 347-420 AD) made a caricature of marriage. The reaction in Christian circles of the time was enormous. Augstine wrote his work about the good of marriage in order to both criticize Jovinianus and to correct Hieronymous. From his own Manicheism period, Augustine knew that Manicheans in Africa condemned marriage, forbad propagation and ridiculed polygamous ancestors. Thus Augustine was of the opinion that both an abstinous life and marriage were a good, even though an abstinence was the greater good.

But Augustine had no good word for sexual desires, usually referred to as *concupiscentia (carnis)*, it being one of the results of the fall into sin. He considered the

marriage of Joseph and Mary as the best of all marriages: it involved no sex. Jesus was the fruit of the concurrence between the Spirit and Mary, where the *concupiscentia carnis* was totally absent. That is the reason Augustine argued that Christ did not know sexual desire that resists the human spirit. That elicited from Julianus of Aeclanum the thought that the person Jesus Augustine promoted was not a real human being.

We have already seen that the evil of sexual desire, according to Augustine, was allowed with a view to propagation, which was considered good (*De bono coniugali* 3.3; *De nuptiis et conscupiscentia* 2.21.36; *Contra Iulianum* 3.21.42; *Opus imperfectum* 1.70). Sexual longing needs to be tempered by the bond of marriage (*De bono coniugali* 6.6). Sex within marriage but without the intention to propagate is a forgivable sin (*De bono coniugali* 6.6), but even then it remains a sin, for it is proof that humans cannot control themselves. Whatever, it is better to have sex within marriage than to search for happiness outside of marriage. In the first case, the sin can be forgiven; not so in the second case (*De bono coniugali* 11.12; *De nuptiis et conscupiscentia* 1. 16-17).

Augustine's discussions about sexuality msut be seen in the light of his search for an explanation of the fact that the human soul is no longer capable of guiding the body. A person can try to control it, but that does not take away that sexual longing is an egocentric way to go. With the help of God's grace, humans can resist the wild impulses of sexual desire. Even the desire to have children is, according to Augustine, perfectly legitimate. To be sure, even animals have sexual desire, but they do not possess reason. Human sexual desire is opposed to the rational good (*bonum rationale*). That is

demonstrated by the human sense of shame and is the reason they dress and sex is practiced in private (*cf. Opus imperfectum* 4:4.37-38). Sexual desire is a disease that touches the entire person (*Confessions* 8.7.17); it must be healed through God's grace.

With the help of God's grace, humans can resist the wild impulses of sexual desire. Even though the human will is severely weakened because of the fall, humans remain capable of doing the good (*capax boni)* but only when encouraged and supported to this end by God's mercy. To a degree, sexual desire can be conquered under grace, but only through much difficulty and only by way of continued strain (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.28; *Contra Iulianum* 2.7). Grace and mercy, when filled in as God's love for human beings that leads to human love for God, change the perspective of humans from focusing on themselves to focusing on God and neighbour, from carnal desire for self to spiritual desire for God. With the help of grace and mercy, human reason is capable in this life to make good use of the evil of sexual desire without overcoming it totally (*De gratia et peccato originali* 2,39). According to Augustine, this is all possible only within a Christian sphere of life, for it is only there that people live "for God" (*proper Deum*), the only correct criterium for human moral acts. But complete healing is only to be expected at the resurrection, when the physical body turns into a spiritual body that no longer needs to strive against human reason and will.

Conclusion

Augustine regarded sexual desire as an evil that was used well within marriage with an eye to procreation. Sex without an eye on propagation is sinful and only

marriage creates a forgiving environment. It is a vision that Augustine defended throughout his entire ecclesiastical career and even enlarged upon through the years. He developed this vision on the one hand on basis of his historical reading of the creation of Adam and his fall into sin (Genesis 1-3). On the other hand, it became his through his personal struggle with sexual desire in his own life. Within Western cultural history this vision was the norm for centuries for ecclesiastical declarations about marriage and sexuality, certainly during a time that ecclesiastical moral language was the privilege of clerics and the religious. A life of abstinence was regarded as the morally better and certainly the safest way in the struggle against unordered experiences of sexual passions. As late as 1930, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Casti connubii,* appealing to Augustine, declared that sex within marriage without the intention of procreation was sinful.

But the times changed and, partially under the influence of existentialism, it gradually became clear that sexuality is an integral part of the human person and it is an legitimate way to demonstrate mutual love and affection within marriage, but without immediately thinking of propagation. This standpoint was expressly confirmed in the constitution *Gaudium et spes* 47-52 and in the Second Vatican Concilium (1962-1965) that treated marriage, but spoke only positively about sexuality. This was really a Copernican revolution: sexuality now took precedence over propagation. The Concilium did not utter a word about Augustine's negative perspective on sexuality as sinful desire. On this point, Augustines's role is done away with today. His opinions are the object of historical research, but

the faithful no longer follow it. Sex is no longer of the devil, but that does not mean that, following Freud, people can regard it as a good without problems. Sex is not a neutral given, but can effectively have a great impact on human behaviour for both good and bad. But that is for another day.

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A Brief Biography of Augustine

> Lectori salute! Welcome to this summary tale about Augustine of Hippo. Would you like to walk along the life of this church father, theologian and philosopher?"[8]

354-366 AD (age 12)—Aurelius Augustine is born in Thagaste, North Africa, as son of the Roman Patricius and Monica. His parents made great financial sacrifices to pay for his education. At his sixteenth birthday they had reached their limit, which caused a period of mischief in his life. The story about the theft of pears, found in his *Confessions* (Book 2), written during the years 397-398 AD, is an example.

370-372 AD (age 16-18)—After a year, his parents, friends and relatives had gathered enough money to finance his further education. In Carthage, he took lessons in Rhetoric and moves in with his concubine. She gives him a son named Adeodatus (given by God). Augustine tells or writes few words about this development, but with considerable pain this relationship ends by a marriage arranged by his mother.

373-383 AD (age 19-29)—After reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, he becomes a true philosophos: a lover of wisdom. He begins an intense search for imperishable, stable truth. He looks for salvation among the Manicheans, a quasi-Christian sect. On his 29th birthday, he moves to Rome to lecture in Rhetoric, as he did earlier in Thagaste and Carthage.

384-387 AD (age 30-33)—Very soon Augustine is appointed to a state position in Milan. There he gets to know the church father Ambrose, whose sermons wean him away from Manicheism. But old habits don't die easily: he does not succeed to convert. Till one day he hears children singing *Tolle, Lege* (Take and Read). He opens the Bible, reads Romans 13:13-14 and experiences a feeling of liberation. He quits his position, decides not to marry and has himself baptized together with his son.

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[8] Augustinus van Hippo Geillustreerd door Studio Joop www.studio-joop.nl . Trans. Jan H. Boer. Original title: "Het leven van Augustus van Hippo." Unfortunately, lack of skill and resources have forced us to skip the illustrations.

388-395 AD (age 34-41)—Eventually, he returns to Thagaste, where he establishes a small community of monks. In the course of a working visit to the port city of Hippo in 391, the local church congregation grabs him and ordains him a priest. Four years later, he is ordained bishop. His many responsibilities, among them daily sermons and administering justice, sometimes are a burden to him.

397-430 (age 43-75)—Augustine is not one to avoid public debate. He writes innumerable letters and books, among them the apologetic work *The City of God.* On his deathbed he consoles himself with a word from the *Enneades* by the NeoPlatonic philosopher Plotinus: "He is not great who thinks it is great that wood and rocks fall apart and that mortal beings die." At that very moment, Hippo is surrounded by the Vandals. Augustine spends his last days by praying penitential psalms.

Augustine and Thomas Aquinas on Good Sex

About Sexual Pleasure Before and After The Fall

By Harm Goris.

Christian teaching and practice have often led to misunderstanding and suppression of sexuality and to body disdain. However, Christianity is not as monolithic as it is sometimes presented. Even in its classic forms it has internal sources for self-critique and self-cleansing. This article is a follow-up to Matthijs Lamberigtse's article about sexuality with Augustine. Harm Goris shows us that the vision of Thomas Aquinas on sexual pleasure is more nuanced, even though with him one can also find traces of body disdain.

Christianity does not have a good reputation with respect to its appreciation of the pleasure of sex. Augustine's doctrine of original sin and the related idea of the "lust of the flesh" (*concupsicentia carnis*) have definitely contributed to this situation. I don't want to make a caricature of Augustine. As Lamberigts shows in his contribution to this thematic issue, some of Augustine's contemporaries were much more extreme in their hostility to the sexual body, especially the female body. The same holds true for many of Augustine's later followers. Furthermore, his texts are sometimes ambiguous with double meanings. Fundamentally, Augustine entertained a pessimistic vision on sexuality, especially sexual pleasure.

In this article I want to contrast Augustine's vision on sexual pleasure with that of another influential theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), and to do that against the background of their differing visions of humanity. While Augustine, following Plato, basis himself on a dualistic anthropology with a strong contrast between body and soul, Thomas handles a more holistic version with its roots in Aristotle. The difference between their two visions of sexual pleasure is best expressed in their analysis of ideal sex, that in Paradise, and its contrast with sex after the fall into sin.

The Paradise Story: Did It Really Happen?

Both Augustine and Thomas read the Biblical story in Genesis 2-3 as a historical text: Adam and Eve did really exist and they have eaten the forbidden fruit. However, in their theology, both utilize the Paradise story for theoretical purposes. The story fulfills a similar function as that of "natural condition" in the thought of

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, and, more recently, Rawls. It is about a thought experiment that by way of contrast, gives an explanation for a fundamental characteristic of our reality. Hobbes and other philosophical contrast thinkers want to clarify the reason for the actual political system.

The theologians Augustine and Aquinas want to use the story of Paradise and the fall to provide a theological explanation for the actual brokenness of mankind in spite of the fact that God has created us as virtuous beings. They are not that interested in what actually occurred with Adam and Eve, but more about what would have happened to them if the fall had not taken place. Would Adam and Eve have propagated? Were they at one time immortal? Would their descendants have formed a hierarchically organized society? Such questions serve to clarify what in our nature can be attributed to human nature itself, which is good because created by God and what is in contrast to the fallen state of that nature.

According to Augustine and the majority of Western theologians, the fall of Adam and Eve has led to so-called "original sin." That is to say that human nature no longer exists in a pure pristine condition, but in a condition that is referred to with a multiplicity of statues and images borrowed from, among others, the jargon of the biological, medical, physical, economical, political, juridical and the aesthetical. Human nature has been attacked internally, wounded, fallen, enslaved, oppressed, guilty and defiled.

When it comes to sex, both Augustine and Thomas think that Adam and Eve did not really engage in it while in Paradise. There was not enough time between their creation and the fall. A more interesting question is what sex would have been like if that first human couple were not driven from Paradise. The answer to this appreciation of sexual pleasure in our question clears up the experience and concrete reality.

Augustine: Sexual Pleasure Problematic

Ultimately, Augustine adopted the opinion that they had intercourse in Paradise, but without any preceding sexual stimulation and the associated physical pleasure. It would have been possible for Adam to make a rational decision on his own initiative to have an erection and coitus with Eve without any of his contribution, Lamberigtse sketches the different phases in the erotic feelings. Augustine did not

express himself clearly about what precisely Eve may have decided about having sex, but in any case she did not experience anything sensually. It is only in his last works that Augustine allows the possibility of an approaching healthy sexual desire in Paradise. But, just as in physical acts, such erotic feelings would arise only under the command of reason and not out of the body itself (Evans 2016, p. 272). Augustine never made his opinion about sexual pleasure explicit to his followers and it is questionable whether the question or idea can be integrated in the whole of his dualistic anthropology. In any case, Augustine never left any space for healthy sexual desire after the fall.

Thomas Aquinus: Best Sex in Paradise

Compared to Augustine, Thomas devotes very little time to speculation about sexuality before the fall. For him it appears less problematic. He bases himself on an Aristotelian anthropology. In contrast to Augustine, Thomas rejects the dualism of body and soul. The human person is rather a unity with a bodily and spiritual aspect. Both aspects are intrinsically related to each other so that there is a constant interchange between them. It is this vision that forms the basis of Thomas' opinion about prelapsarian sexuality.

According to Thomas, sex in Paradise was much more delightful than it is now. In his main work, the *Summa Theologiae*, he discusses the argument that propagation in the "state of innocence" while in Paradise would have been without intercourse, for in the physical union humans resemble animals the most because of the vehemence of the pleasure (*delectation)*. He counters the argument as follows:

> During coitus a person becomes beastly to the extent that he neither can regulate (*moderari)* the pleasure of it nor the tempestuousness of the lust (*concupiscentia*) with his reason. However, in the original state of innocence all of that was regulated by reason. The reason for this was that the sensual pleasure (*delectation secundum sensum*) would be less, as some insist. It would have been stronger if human nature were more pure and the body more sensitive. The reason was that the power of craving (*vis concupiscibilis*) would not have allowed such disorderly behavior during such pleasure but would have been regulated by reason. That regulation does not lead to reduced sensual pleasure, but it does mean that the power of the

> craving does not go beyond a moderate measure in such pleasure. By "beyond… measure" I mean "beyond the measure (*mensura*) of reason. The modest person takes in his food moderately but does not experience less pleasure than the glutton (*Summa Theologiae* 1.98.2.3. (Translator: This quoted paragraph is a translation from Goris' Dutch translation, not from the original Latin to which access was difficult).

"The power of desire" or craving refers to its own natural way of working and to the sensual desires of the human body such as food, warmth, recreation and then also sex. The body feels its power from within itself and from nature. Thus, the bodies of Adam and Eve also had such sensual longings and passions. They were neither absent nor only the result of willful decisions in the soul, as Augustine thought.

We share such physical-sensual desires with the other animals, but they are different as well sometimes. Here we see the significant role of Aristotelian anthropology. The spiritual and the physical are closely related to each other. Just like human physical passions, desires and emotions, these must be regulated or ordered by what distinguishes us from other animals, namely reason (*ratio*). We must not understand this regulation through the ratio as suppression but as coaching. The ratio or mind must relate our feelings and emotions to culture so that they come to full bloom and our sensual desires be satisfied better (Lombardo 2011, p. 94-116). Thomas makes the contrast between a gorger and a dainty eater. Who is more satisfied? The consumer of croquettes or the culinary expert who eats in five-star restaurants and drinks select wines?

Thomas Aquinas: virtuous sex after the fall

Thomas follows Aristotle in the opinion that the actual regulating of physical passions and emotions through reason is a given with human nature. Even though there are inborn differences, a person is by nature personally responsible for his/her character formation by practicing and acquiring virtues. He then places Aristotle's vision in a Christian context. Before the fall, Adam and Eve did not live in a purely natural state: God had given their nature an extra supernatural gift so that from the beginning they had at their disposal all virtues and the full power over their body and its desires. Humanity lost this extra gift after the fall, but that does not mean

that our human nature now exists in a pristine state. We are afflicted with original sin: in addition to the loss of this supernatural gift, human nature itself is wounded (Goris 2017). One of these wounds is the inborn resistance of our power of desire against the regulating mind. That does not show up in the last place in our sexual desires. Thomas acknowledges that after the fall this can be inhumanly beastly: addictive, self-destructive and violent over against others. But the fall has not destroyed all the good of God's creation, also not in terms of sexual pleasure. How does Thomas try to find a balance?

Thomas' writings about sexual enjoyment after the fall are ambiguous. He wants to associate the negative vision of Augustine with the more positive approach of Aristotle, but the question is whether he really succeeds. I will first name two points that illustrate the tension between the Augustinian and the Aristotelian backgrounds. After that I will briefly treat two basic ideas in Thomas' ethics of virtue and apply those to sexual pleasure.

The virtue that must regulate sexual feelings and behaviours to ensure good human feelings and behaviours, is called "chastity" (*castitas*). Chastity falls under the umbrella virtue of moderation (*temperantia*), which controls the physical-sensuous desires in general. In some languages chastity has the connotation of prudishness, squeamishness, or of sexual abstinence. In Latin it is somewhat different. Thomas traces "*castitas*" etymologically to the verb "*castigare*", which means "chastisement" or "restraint." And, indeed, we often find in his works the proposition that sexual pleasure must be restrained or suppressed. Here he follows Augustine's line. However, this approach to sexual pleasure stands in a relationship of tension with Thomas' general vision on virtue. A virtue is an attribute that sees to it that you automatically, i.e., without much brooding over it, do the good with pleasure and without difficulty (*Quaestio disputata de virtutibus* 1.9.13). Here is precisely the difference between a person who has only self-control (*continentia*) but not the virtue itself, while the other has to really exert himself to guide his sexual desires into positive direction (Pickave 2013). In addition, Thomas basis himself on an Aristotelian anthropology. Unlike Augustine, he rejects the dualism of soul and body. Chastity would exist only in restraint, if Adam and Even did not have this virtue before the fall.

It appears Thomas also follows Augustine's opinion when he says that sexuality exists for the sake of propagation and for the strengthening of the marriage bond between a man and a woman. He creates the impression that he is turning sexuality into an instrument that sees no inherent value in physical sexual enjoyment itself. But, as we already saw earlier, Thomas, in following Aristotle, also proposes that the physical-sensual part of the person has its own longings and joy (*delectation*). Sensual pleasure is good for the physical-sensual and therefore for the entire person (*Summa Theologiae* 1-2.30.1). In short, sensual pleasure, including the sexual, has its own goodness and value and is not merely an instrument for something else.

Next to these specific points that show a tension in Thomas' appreciation of sexual pleasure, there are also two more general principles of interest that make clear that sexual pleasure is not an isolated force. First of all, it is not the most important or highest good, at least not for most people. According to Thomas, every person acknowledges a hierarchy of good things with at the apex the ultimate goal (*finis ultimus*), which is that for which you do everything; it is the meaning of your life, that which you expect will make you happy. That can be almost anything: sensual pleasure, wealth, power, fame, knowledge about being one with God (*Summa Theologiae* 1-2.1 to 6). One is not always completely aware of her deepest emotions, but they are the ones that ultimately determine your acts of commission and of omission. For example, you can decide to forego sexual pleasure one evening, because you need to rise early the next morning, or because you need to go for training, or because you need to work on the world championship for swimming, or because you want to become famous. That is not to say you find sexual pleasure sinful, but you arrange it within the whole of your life and identity formation. That also holds for those who have the true end purpose of life, namely union with God. You should avoid everything that diverts you from that. Sometimes that can also be sexual pleasure, but not necessarily so. Sexual pleasure can also come in an environment of thankfulness and joy over God's creation of the physical and the sensual, even if only indirectly. It is also possible even in the context of an ecstatic love life in imitation of God Himself (McAleer 2005). Thomas does not himself give these concrete examples about the context of sexual pleasure, but they would fit well in his general vision on the hierarchy of the good and the role of the ultimate goal.

Secondly, a real virtue, according to Thomas, is never isolated but is related to all other virtues. One is not really moderate (*temperans*), if she does not simultaneously have the other major virtues, namely courage (*fortitude*), wisdom (*prudential*) and justice (*iustitia*). That holds also for chastity. Sexuality is a complex whole of desires and behaviours within which many issues play a role. Besides sensual pleasure, it is also about your own physical health, your psychic wellbeing and about your relationships with others. True chastity can therefore not do without wisdom, patience and self-confidence, which belong under the umbrella of courage, and neither, in so far as it concerns relationships to others, can it do without certain specific virtues that fall under justice, like honesty, faithfulness or friendliness.

When Thomas explains the etymology of the Latin *castitas* as derived from *castigare*, chastisement, he refers to a passage in Book 3 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle there use the Greek word "*akolastos"* for someone who lacks the general virtue of moderation and compares such a person to a child. The same Greek word is also used in some languages as "brought up badly"; in Latin it is "*in-disciplinatus,*" that does not refer to much to a lack of discipline in the sense of order, but rather to a lack of upbringing. The Latin equivalent of "*akolastos"* is "*in-castigatus"* or "undisciplined." If Thomas had developed this further and had pointed to the acquisition of chastity in the context of (self)upbringing and self-training, he would better have embedded chastity in his general doctrine of virtues. Sexual pleasure becomes mature after life-long reasonable cultivation of emotions and in self-upbringing within which suppression or punishment have an occasional place, but that must not represent the major tone. Good sex must be learned; bad sex can be unlearned.

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Augustine as Guide for the Good Life:

In Dialogue with Philosopher Jamie Smith[9]

By Wilco de Vries

Few philosophers sell more than half a million books, but Jamie Smith is one of them. Professor of philosophy at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Editor-in-Chief of *Image*, a magazine about art and faith, and author of *On the Road with Saint Augustine*, Smith is a man with many faces and just as many talents. Wilco de Vries interviewed Smith about Augustine and Dooyeweerd, and asks advice for the revitalizing of Christian philosophy in the Netherlands.

You have studied at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, you re-edited Dooyeweerd's *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, and currently teach at Calvin University. Where and when did Augustine wander into this Neo-Calvinistic world?

"At the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS). My teacher, Bob Sweetman, who was a long-time professor at the ICS, actually trained as a medievalist. He introduced me into the Neo-Calvinistic tradition and philosophy and built bridges to the sources of this tradition. He had us read *De Ordine* (About Order), one of Augustine's early dialogues. In a certain sense I thus began to read Augustine and Dooyeweerd side by side. I experienced the Augustinian and Neo-Calvinistic traditions as a unity because they share a deep sense of holism. They rejected dualism, gave a significant place to the human race as an affective being, and gave a much richer description of *ratio* or reason than did Enlightenment philosophers."

You emphasize the continuity between Augustine and the Neo-Calvinistic tradition. Where do you see the differences?

I find the Neo-Calvinist critique on Augustine as a dualist goes way too fast. Also, I find the historiography of Vollenhoven not particularly clarifying and useful. It is too much of pushing thinkers into their boxes. Of course, there are Platonic elements in the thought of Augustine, but the later bishop has developed further. He begins more and more to see reality in the light of the incarnation. In addition,

[9] Original title: "Augustinus als gids voor het goed eleven: In gesprek met Jamie Smith."

the Dooyeweerdian stream, as I have learned to know it, lends itself to an individualized spirituality. Augustine offers here a welcome correction with his robust ecclesiology and his emphasis on the sacraments.

> (Let me lay my cards on the table: I do not define myself as a Reformed philosopher. That said, the two years I spent at the ICS have been the most intellectually formative of my life. I still have the idea that I live out of the spirit of that tradition.)

In your work do you lay the emphasis on desire, as, for example, in *Desiring the Kingdom*? Does that emphasis form a correction on "worldview-thinking" where the stress appears to lie on reason?

"I think that Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd are part of a deep philosophical-theological undercurrent. Throughout history, various accents have been laid and there is a variety of blind spots. When you read Augustine, you become aware of elements that receive less emphasis in Dooyeweerd and the succeeding tradition. I think that the Reformed tradition after Dooyeweerd is still very Neo-Kantian. In its criticism of the Enlightenment, this tradition is most likely too unaware of their own rather narrow concept of rationality. In that sense, reading Augustine means paying attention to love and desire, 'de ordo amoris.' Augustine will most likely also help you see things in Dooyeweerd and Bavinck that we initially overlooked."

Augustine helps you to read Bavinck and Kuyper with another hermeneutic? When you read Augustine you can become aware of elements that receive less emphasis by Dooyeweerd and the tradition after him. Augustine helps you to read Bavinck and Kuyper with another hermeneutic?

"Yes. You know what is so interesting? During the mid-nineteen nineties, during my time at ICS, we read feminist literature and brought that into dialogue with Neo-Calvinist philosophy. The feminists we read were critical of the Kantian ego. Reading them made me realize that some aspects of the Reformed ego are also very Kantian. When we hold philosophical and theological dialogue in a broader context, we can pick out themes from the Christian tradition that otherwise we might forget."

Imagine a reader of Sophie who does not know you. He goes to your website, reads your blogs and reviews your books. The person may well gain the impression that you enjoy integrating opposites. You are a Canadian who works in the USA. You received your doctorate from a Catholic university (Villanova University); you work at a Neo-Calvinist centre (Calvin University); you are Reformed and Charismatic. You have written books about Postmodernism and an introduction to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* , one of the greatest metastories of the past decade. What is the red thread? Augustine's theology of desire?

Laughing, "I hope Jesus is that red thread, but you're asking a good question. Catholicism in its deepest, most robust sense of the word is one of the impulses of my philosophical work. There are so many different gifts in the Body of Christ in all its various appearances. I try to listen and to search for the gifts where they are to be found. That, of course, is a deep Augustinian impulse: All truth is God's truth. At the same time, this is the approach I learned at the ICS. [Smith walks away from his desk and digs around in his book case.] Do you know this book of Jacob Klapwijk, Sander Griffioen and Gerben Groenewould, *Bringing into Captivity Every Thought?* This is a book I had to read at the ICS. Its basic message for me was that we are philosophers centred in Christ, and that is the reason we can dialogue with other people and listen to the truth wherever it is found. I have tried to embody this attitude in my work. I do not think it a virtue if on your fiftieth you think the same as on your twentieth."

Very Augustinian: I admit I try to belong to that group of people who write while they are developing themselves and who develop themselves while they are writing" (Augustine, letter 143.2).

"Precisely! I want to stay curious, listen and remain critical about my earlier thoughts should that become necessary. Especially here in the American context, the culture wars are overwhelming. I don't want to sound complacent when I say that I try to transcend these culture wars. I hope that my work is characterized by an openness to ideas and to truth wherever these are found."

Is your stance also formed by your earlier work in hermeneutics and the virtue of hermeneutical generosity?

"Absolutely! At the ICS I discovered not only the entire Reformational tradition but also that of continental philosophy, especially Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida. I found the conversations within the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition very fruitful for thinking through Christian questions. It is probably similar in the Netherlands, but here in the USA, Christian philosophy threatens to become dominated by analytical philosophy. Just think of Al Plantinga's approach. I find it very encouraging that a small but growing group of continental, phenomenological philosophers has arisen that also thinks Christianly. For me, Merold Westphal was a great example. I have learned much from him."

Let's go back to Augustine for a moment. He appears to be more for you than just one who inspires you. At the end of *On the Road with Saint Augustine*, you write about your visit to Augustine. Is he also important for you because as Canadian in the USA you yourself are a kind of pilgrim? Do you feel a kind of existential relationship with Augustine as he tells how he moved from Africa to Rome and Milan?

"Absolutely. I think that Augustine in his entire life lived at some distance from society. He is a philosopher and theologian, but his heart is more in caring for the faithful in Carthage and Hippo. That feeling between cultures and intellectual centres is a very healthy space within which to reflect. It is difficult, but it keeps you honest. The challenge, of course, is that you naturally begin to feel somewhat homeless. I do not really have a philosophical background, but I do have a community, friends and other meaningful connections that feed my philosophical reflections. Philosophers are always more. I hope that my work is characterized by an open attitude towards ideas and truth, wherever they may be found, not only in their mind. To cultivate our philosophical imagination, we must pay attention to all sorts of aspects of our being human."

In your book you say that modernity is Augustinian. Can you expand on that claim?

"I perhaps enjoyed mostly the writing of this part of *On the Road with Saint Augustine*. I have been trained in the twentieth-century French philosophy of Derrida and Foucault. I also enjoy Albert Camus and other French writers. It is so fascinating that when you look at figures like Camus or Derrida or Jean-Francois

Lyotard, you realize somewhere along the line that they have all preoccupied themselves with Augustine in a very serious manner. They are all Algerians and come from North Africa. They lived like Augustine: they left North Africa for the intellectual centre of the Continent. A part of my book is therefore Heidegger and his reading of Augustine. Many existential concepts are the direct trickle-down effect of philosophers that work on Augustine. In that sense, the modern search for authenticity is a direct product of how Heidegger read Augustine's *Confessions* or, at least, an implication. In a certain way we do not realize how Augustinian we are. Because we have inherited Augustinian questions via existentialism, I want to remind people of Augustine's answers to these questions.

Continuing along this line, in what respect has Augustine's idea of freedom influenced the existential, modern striving for authenticity and in which way does it differ?

"As I see it, Augustine's work is a revolutionary moment in the history of Western thought when it deals with acknowledging the agency of the human self. I am referring to the recognition of our inner being, freedom and desire. Even desire is related to freedom. Who do I want to be? How do I become free? In that sense the blooming of the Kantian Enlightenment ideal of autonomy and freedom was possible only through the seeds that were planted by Augustine. In modernity, freedom becomes negative: I am free to the extent that I am not restrained. Freedom is to be able to do what I want. For Augustine, true freedom is the capacity to do the good, to live up to our purpose. Augustine's freedom sounds like a kind of prison to some modern people, but I think that, now in our twenty-first century, we see the effects of unrestricted freedom: slavery to the passions of any sort of modern tyranny. That is the reason that I think Augustine's concept of restricted freedom—that is, freedom from evil and a focus on the good—is a gift for a society that is exhausted by her pseudo-freedom. "

Freedom assumes relationship and community. In your book you strongly emphasize the importance of community in order to come to faith and true freedom. Here's a citation: "The turning point for Augustine was not an argument, but Ambrose" (150). In your emphasis on community I see many comparisons with Stanley Hauerwas. That is why I want to place the question often put to Hauerwas before you: Where can we find your church?

Laughing: “In Grand Rapids, Stanley had an enormous influence on me. About a decade after the ICS, I woke up and had to process the idealism of that image that was dished up for me. The church I write about in my books is not perfect; it is just an ordinary space where people try to live along God’s story. For that, we need a liturgy and works of mercy and justice. It is not the large sexy mega-church around the corner with 2,000 people. It is rather a small Presbyterian or Methodist church that never makes the news. Just becoming a part of an intentional community makes certain demands on me, because that’s where I learn to love God and my neighbour, even on days that such a community makes me angry. You don’t need a perfect church to be a forming church. I think many churches are giving form in a way they do not realize. Another aspect that I must mention—and that demands a much longer discussion—is the manner in which the church can misshape, misform, because they are caught up in political or racist ideologies. The church is always a mixed body, but that also is a very Augustinian principle: the chaff and the wheat.”

Do I understand you right when I say your kind of church demands faithfulness? A mega-church does not demand commitment, for you can enter just for the show and leave when you want. That small Methodist church demands loyalty. You are challenged, formed and mis-formed, but it is through that commitment that God gives His grace.

“Yes. And here we come back to the theme of the sacraments. God is present in the word and at the table. This regular meeting with God in that “monotonous” reality amounts to a submerging in the river of the Spirit in a manner we will never understand fully.”

You are also part of another community, namely the university. In your book you write about the vice of *curiositas*, that extreme striving after knowledge, which can arouse fear because we must “be with it.” Does the university and the constantly increasing specialization feed this vice?

Here we must reflect at a couple of levels. I think this is the case especially in large universities like Duke. Philosophers are always more than just reason and in order to cultivate our philosophical imagination, we must pay attention to all sorts of aspects of being human and appreciate new knowledge. The hyper-specialization

that goes together with the desire for the new almost undermines education. There is a form of curiosity where it is only about the promotion of knowledge to show that we have broadened out our knowledge. It is not about the good life. Such an approach to research is a breeding nest for competition and discourages friendship. I teach at a smaller university where we need to utilize a much more holistic approach to education and on the strife after wisdom and formation. The danger at my kind of university is not so much obtaining research grants and the proclivity for the newest of the new, but the pure pragmatism of knowledge. I need this knowledge, so that I can earn my income in this position. Such an attitude undermines what Augustine means with a wise and good life. The last thing I want to say is that philosophy as a discipline is in some sense the most guilty. In hardcore academic philosophy no one is interested in wisdom. It is simply about winning the debate, to be original. That's the reason I do not devote much energy to participating in academic philosophy, for I have different goals.

In which manner do you think a Christian university can serve as an antidote against this misformation through *curiositas*?

Whether we at Calvin University form an antidote is another question. What I mean is that today it is very difficult to be an antidote, because both students and parents have a series of expectations about what the universities must do. We need to give students information from their fifth to their eighteenth about what a university is and does. What should be possible idealistically at a Christian university is a holistic and integrated curriculum, a vision of how all disciplines contribute to an understanding of God, the world and ourselves.

The problem is that the market for higher education opposes such a vision. We have all to compete in the market of higher education, and we all try to sell a product instead of helping people develop a vision. You are catching me, I think, at a very hopeless moment when it comes to the possibilities for Christian higher education here in the USA. It is not that it is impossible *per se*, but because there are all those environmental factors that restrain us. Universities hunt for the lowest common denominator of pragmatism."

One final question. The Foundation for Christian Philosophy in the Netherlands is currently trying to rediscover and redesign itself with an eye to the new generation.

You are a very talented writer and you have won several prizes for your books. Do you have any advice about how the Foundation can write in such a way that the new generation will read it, especially in a time of social media and infinite scrolling?

That's a very good question. I think that we must resist the sound bites of the social media, because they can never deliver wisdom to us. There is a difference between intellectual and academic writing. Academic writing is technical, written for a specific guild, an internos kind of circle of people. However, that is not the only way to write intellectually. Think, for example, about Alain de Botton or even a Christopher Hitchens. My hope is that the next generation will embrace writing as an occupation. During the last decade, I have worked at making it understood that writing is its own profession and not merely a means to share ideas. It is the embrace of the aesthetic in philosophical writings for a broader public.

Put in Dooyweerdian terms, in philosophical writing for the broader public, philosophy is still the leading aspect. However, one also needs to cultivate the aesthetic aspect of writing, so that your writing is beautiful, creates movement, touches the heart. That's the reason I seriously encourage philosophers to read novels and poetry. This is not in order to mine citations for an argument you have already decided, but in order to live into the language, to realize that language can also work in other ways. Most philosophical writings are linear: argument A, B, and C lead to conclusion D. In poetic prose and in fiction, language wiggles. It is almost a game. One of my dreams is a workshop for philosophers to write creatively. I am still learning how to write creatively, but what I have learned has come from my contact with writers of novels and poetry. One of my side roles is that of editor of the magazine *Image*, a literary quarterly. One of the reasons I do this is to hang around novelists and poets.

In order to hone your writing skills?

"Yes, absolutely, but also to learn how to listen."

Chapter 9

Living with Augustine:

The Spirituality of the Augustinians[10]

By Martijn Schrama

EDITOR: Augustine himself lived in a monastery and wrote a monastic rule. Today, there are still monks who are inspired by Augustine's rule. Martijn Schrama, himself belonging to the *Ordo Sancti Augustini*, describes the origin of the Augustinian Order and their spirituality such as the theology of love, healing and helping grace, virtues and Christ's mediatorship.

At the end of the fourth century, Augustine proposed a fairly short monastic rule to his housemates with whom he was forming a monastic community. The ideal first Christian community he had in view was that of Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-35). The Rule is to a large extent inspired by the Bible. It calls on the housemates to go on the way to God as a community (Rule c.1). The continuing longing for God is also a source of continuing prayer to Him (Rule c.2). In a community that itself is on the way, the practice of hospitality is not seen as a mission of people who know they have arrived, but such a service flows out of the awareness that all people on earth are on the way and on that journey form one large community.

Caritas, love to God and neighbour, is the key word in the Rule. There is an emphasis on communal ownership of goods and communal prayer at fixed times throughout the day. This not regarded as a means for each housemate to reach his own level of holiness, but as a community as a whole to spread the sweet fragrance of Christ. Such a community grows and becomes more mature by cultivating respect for each other--"Honour God in each other, for each one of you has become His temple (Rule c.1). The growth process is stimulated by the desire for God and by the awareness that Christ identifies with each of them. Having an eye for that identification is also characteristic for Augustine's ecclesiology.

The mutual love is tested and purified by taking the housemates into account and by having patience with them; by immediately forgiving each other in the heart after a quarrel and not to be headstrong; by the daily unselfish exertions on behalf

[10] Original title: "Living with Augustinus: De spiritualiteit van de Augustijnen."

of the household and what the community asks further. Not claiming ownership, communal use of goods and personal soberness are understood as participating in divine love. The relationship between the Superior and the other religious members needs to rest on love and mutual trust. The office of Superior is a service to the community. “Let the Prior not seek his happiness in his / her authority, but through service in love” (Rule c.7). In everything the Rule breathes a spirit of generosity. It pleads for internalizing the acts of daily life and to allow it to move through the heart.

Augustine emphasizes that the Rule can only be fruitfully followed within Christian freedom—“not as slaver under the law, but as free people under grace” (Rule c.8).When there is spiritual progress, thank God, so the Rule advises, because all good things in a human community ultimately are a gift from Him, not earnings on our part. The eighth and last chapter of Augustine’s Ruleplays on the positive working of the entire community on its environment, not as planned action but as pure nearness. As lovers of divine beauty, the religious will spread the sweet fragrance of Christ in the world by their love for God and for each other as a community.

Advice for Monks

In addition to the Rule, there are other works of Augustine with influence on the spirituality of Augustinians. In *The Labour of Monks* he lays the basis for monastic labour in the larger context of the duty of labour for each Christian. In Sermons 355 and 356, recently having been appointed bishop, he lays responsibility on his congregation over the form of communal life in the bishop’s household. His *collegae pastores* live together with him under one roof. They have everything in common and lead a sober life in service to evangelism and church.

In Letter 48, he encourages the monks on the island of Capraia to assist the Church with pastoral services when it is needed. They may never think of their contemplative rest time as higher than the needs of the Church, but at the same time not neglect the contemplative life. In Sermon 104, he criticizes a quietist-coloured piety. He considers contemplation without action possible only in heaven. In this life the seeker after God needs to strive to become both Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42).

Augustine's opinion about the close relationship between the contemplative life and pastoral activities is characteristic of the spirituality of the Augustinian Order ever since its beginning. The order was started in the thirteenth century by the unification of a number of hermitages (communities of hermits) in Toscanini. Their unification was based on Augustine's Rule. At the urging of the Pope, their definite merger was firmly established in Rome in 1256 during the first general meeting of the Order.

The Augustinian Order contributed to the dual ideal of evangelical poverty and apostolic brotherhood that in the course of reforming movements during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were propagated and took shape among the so-called beggar orders.

All the remaining works of Augustine are an important part of Augustinian formation and study. They serve as inspiration for their preaching. By means of regular changes in liturgy and dedicated study, and with a heavy emphasis on both the loneliness in the monastery cell and servanthood to the church, the order has produced many exegetes and preachers. United by reading and interpreting Augustine's writings, they developed a way of thinking and living in which already early on the emphasis was laid on three primary factors: (a) love; (b) the healing and living grace to enable them to be virtuous; (c) the Mediator Jesus Christ.

Theology of Love

Humans are most intimately united with God through His love. Divine love focuses on the will of humans and on the heart, which is the seat of affections. The primacy of the will flows forth from the primacy of the heart. The spiritual writers of the Order focused their attention not exclusively on the rational side of the soul, but preferred to dwell on its affective possibilities, for all the capabilities of the soul, namely, consciousness, will and reason are images of the Trinitarian God. Through this means a harmonious bond is established between the knowledge of the spirit and the affections of the heart.

The first Augustinian theologians, Aegidius Romanus (1243-1316) and Jacobus van Viterbo (c. 1255-1308), made the affective relationship with God their main theme. Their theology is primarily to describe the relationship between sinful humanity and God, who gives humans salvation and leads them to their

glorification. Speculation about how God exists *an sich* without including humans, leads nowhere. Theological knowledge needs to encourage love. Theology is not solely focused on speculations nor merely on moral deeds, but first of all on stimulating the affections of the heart. Augustinians call their theology "*theologia affective."* From there, insight and moral behavior emerge from the positive reaction of mankind to the affections or emotions brought about by God in the human soul.

Divine love sees to it that every human being has an in-created longing for God. This vision does not tolerate a so-called natural world as an independently existing world, existing without God. Neither will it tolerate an unbridgeable chasm between the supernatural and the natural. Augustine and the church fathers recognized a natural and obvious crossover from the natural to the supernatural, which also comes to expression in the Augustinians' explanation how mankind needs to hold up the dual commandment of love, love to God and neighbour. Here also it is about that one undivided love, whereby love to neighbour becomes the criterion to test the true shape of our love for God.

Love is attractive and leads to true happiness and salvation. According to this vision, this attraction of God's love leads people to the effort to overcome sin. In his commentary on Luke 14:23—"make them come in"-- Johannes Zachariae (before 1384-1428) writes:

> This happens through the soft force of what virtue does and gives pleasure, not through any form of forceful violence, but so that a person chooses freely to seek the good. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father…draws him" (John 6:44). That is to say, unless the Father has worked in the will of that person and changed him.

Healing and Helping Grace

Humans are truly connected with God through His grace, already since Paradise. That is the source of the special relationship between them. The possibility of a human nature that has its own self-empowered independence, separate from the divine world, is rejected. As creatures, since their origin, humans naturally are to be connected to their Creator. His graceful influence finds its fullness not only in

the will, but also in the mind and in reason. Every positive epistemological result is preceded by a moment of divine enlightenment.

The Augustinian vision on mankind has an eye for the dynamic relationship between divine grace and human freedom. The more a person attributes to grace, the more free he is. Only in so far as the will is motivated by grace, can one speak of a free will. Before helping grace elevate mankind to a higher plane, healing grace must heal human nature that is damaged by the fall. Mankind is sick; his capabilities to will and to know are seriously weakened. Healing grace is needed to stimulate healing.

Already Aegidius Romanus spoke of this:

> Adam was wounded in his natural capabilities, not to the extent that he lost what belonged to his nature, but in such a way that those natural capabilities were less capable to do good and more to do sin. Because of the resistance by desire, we see in our members a law that fights against the law of the spirit (Romans 7:23), wherefore it is difficult for a human to do the good. For there is in us, no matter what state of grace and good will we find ourselves in, an ongoing battle against the vices.

God grants the repentant sinner forgiveness, provided his repentance is motivated by love, not by fear for punishment. Here also the faith that mankind is taken up into God's love, forms the basis on which confession of guilt leads to freedom and happiness. Love makes the relationship that already exists between God and mankind grow. Fear makes it wither. In loving trust, confessing your own failures restores and strengthens the awareness of the original bond.

Augustinians emphasize God's acts in humans completely in the line of Augustine. Aegidius Romanus writes,

> If we want to avoid evil actions, the only means available to us is that we, possessing God's grace, allow Him to move us, to lead and guide us. As soon as we want to be moved only by our own opinions, we fail in doing good deeds and acts. Thus, if we want to persevere in the good, more happens within us (*affici*) than that we ourselves do. God grants the

repentant sinner forgiveness, as long as this repentance is inspired by love, not by fear of punishment.

Virtues

The Christian life is rooted in God's love, in the Holy Spirit as a gift. We have access to this love not from the sources of nature or from our own will, but it is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is a gift to us (Romans 5:5). To bear fruit, a person needs to have a part in this love. He needs to be led by grace. The concurrence of God and human , from the side of the sinful person, is primarily a question of surrendering and following. Prayer is also placed within the context of love. It is a physical-spiritual expression with or without words, of the desire for God that lives in humans.

Thus Christian perfection exists fundamentally in the love that comes from God. It is God as the first to give His love. Subsequently, a person gives love back to God by spending it on the neighbour. In the environment of such loving acts the virtues develop and grow. Every virtue is an aspect of love. However, vices can also be hidden under the appearance of virtue, especially pride. Augustine warns in his Rule (c.1) that pride knows even how to spoil good deeds.

The spiritual writers of the Augustinian Order do not recommend holiness as a heroic practice of virtue by a religious elite. The potential for holiness is recognized for everyone who is called to it by God. When it comes to asceticism, they do not place an emphasis on strictness so much as honesty and humility. They do not adhere to any special method but more to the good will and loving freedom in which the ascetic is experienced. However, they do not consider soberness as a form of ascetics, but more as the social side of love.

The Mediator Jesus Christ

The good works of people fall short. In line with their doctrine of original sin, the Augustinians point to the lack of their own righteousness. They emphasize that humans always fall short over against God and remain His debtors, even in the doing of good works. That is the reason they warn against the falsehood of self-justification in which people highly praise their own good works and have the audacity to trust in their own merit.

Albertus of Padua (1282-c.1325) writes:

> No matter how great their merit may be, humans cannot trust in their own righteousness for four reasons: (a) our own righteousness is insecure, for no one can be sure whether his works are righteous; (b) our works of mercy are always tainted with sin; (c) our righteousness is not solid, for one can lose this righteousness at any moment; (d) our good works have not yet been tested, but must still be brought before the judgement of God.

Thomas of Villanova (1488-1555) also warns against self-praise and trusting in your own righteousness:

> Blessed are those to whom the Lord grants doing good without they themselves promoting their works, but only praising Jesus Christ. Our hope must be founded only on Him who gives life to our dead works through His grace and adds lustre to them so that they are worthy of eternal life. That is the reason our own righteousness is to be despised and only the righteousness of God is to be highly praised. For as much as we denigrade our own earnings, that much will be ascribed to God's grace. Those who lean on God because of their mistrust of themselves, stand firm in God and do their works in humility and love to God. May they forget their own good works in order that they may remember God.

Without denying that good works can be regarded meritorious by God, Augustinians point also to Augustus' declaration that in our services God crowns His own gifts. Humans need to base their trust not on their own merits, but on Jesus Christ. Out of that bond to the Lord Jesus, the believer needs to trust on God's mercy. The fulfillment that Jesus Christ gives to our works is absolutely necessary to face God's judgement. This thought emerges from Augustine's church experience: The fellowship among believers exists due to the Lord Jesus who identifies Himself with every believer. The fellowship (*Totus Christus*) that arises out of this identification process supplements what is lacking in the individual believer. In addition, herewith the mystical cohesion of the Church is emphasized.

Martijn Schrama taught Pastristics and the History of Theology and Spirituality at the Catholic Theological University, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

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Chapter 10

I Want to Die in Order not to Die:

Augustine and His Association with Death[11]

By Hans Alderliesten

"Life is a mist; death beckons every hour." Certainly in ancient times. Hans Alderliesten discusses Augustine's description in *The Confessions* of the death of his mother's friend during her youth. He demonstrates that the way Augustine related to their death and to his own life's end still contains important lessons for us.

The death of a loved one is an existential experience. Death determines our mortality and is absolute in its irreversibility. In his *Confessions,* Augustine writes an extensive report of the death of a friend and of his mother. As psychologist *avant la lettre* he sometimes describes contradictory emotions and shows how he deals with death. He reacts very differently to these deaths as we shall see in paragraphs 1 and 2. This makes the contemplation of death interesting. In paragraph 3, I will reflect on the manner in which Augustine approached his own death.

1. The Death of a Youth Friend: "Wherever I looked, there was death."

Thagasta, about 374 AD—Augustine is now twenty years old and is appointed teacher of rhetoric. He establishes friendship with a man whose name we do not know. He was of the same age and they both grew up together and shared the same interests. It is not clear whether they were friends from their childhood or whether their friendship began later. However it came about, it was a delightful friendship, matured in the glow of similar interests."(1) Augustine had convinced him to say farewell to his simple faith and to become Manichean. "I persuaded the young man to accept the Manichean superstitious and destructive fables, about which my mother wept," he writes later.(2) Somewhere along the line, the friend becomes seriously ill. He has high fever and becomes unconscious. Floating in the sweat of death, he was baptized without knowing it, most likely by his relatives as was the custom at the time. At the time, Augustine saw little value in baptism; in fact, he mocked it. His friend improves somewhat and appears to have changed. When

[11] Original title: "Sterven wil ik om niet te sterven: Augustinus en de omgang met de dood."

Augustine meets him later, he mocks his baptism. His friend looks at him "shivering with disgust as if I were an enemy." The friend is converted to Christianity and bad Manicheism farewell. Not much later, he dies.

Augustine is devastated. Observe what he writes in his *Confessions*: "Wherever I looked there was death. My home town was torture to me and my parental home a strange misery. Everything that I had shared with him was changed into an appalling torment without him."(4) Augustine is so beside himself that he no longer recognizes himself. He became a mystery to himself. "I had become a deep question for myself and I kept interrogating my soul why it was so sad and why it so alarmed me. It did not give a single answer." (5) He missed his friend and their amicable association, "Chatting together, laughing together, helping each other, together reading books in various languages, praying together and becoming serious together, and now and then differing in opinions without hatred."(6) Love for his friend makes him hate death. (7) He writes that he finds rest in bitterness. (8) His tears taste sweet, "They had replaced my friend in the joys of my soul." (9)

2. The Passing of Mother Monica

No less compelling, but Augustine reacts very different to the passing of his mother in 387 AD. At the time, he was 33 years old, not long after his conversion. His conversion brought great joy to Mother Monica, who was always praying for this and saved neither efforts nor expenses to follow her son around. Augustine had intended to return to Africa. He bad his academic career farewell and decided to withdraw together with a number of kindred spirits to form a commune. Having arrived in antique Ostia, an Italian port city, he prepared himself to sail to Africa. Monica dies there at around age 56. (10)

Most likely Monica died suddenly. There was a brief sickbed stay prior to her dying. "After barely five days, she went to bed with a fever. While convalescing, she lost her consciousness and with it all her senses.(11) Augustine and Navigius, Monica's two sons, were with her at her death, which probably took place in an inn, as well as Adeodatus, her grandson, and Evodius, a friend of Augustine Jr., with whom a few days earlier she had an intimate discussion. Augustine Sr. describes the event in intense language in his *Confessions*: "I pressed her eyes closed and in my innermost an immeasurably deep sadness overcame me; the tears

threatened to become a flood. But immediately, on a sharp demand in my spirit, the eyes dried up again. The struggle made me feel very bad." (12)

Why does Augustine not allow his tears a free run? He provides the answer himself: "We did not find it appropriate to demonstrate our participation in this dying by weeping complaints and lamentations, because usually such sadness is accompanied with a certain commiseration aroused in dying folk about their assumed complete annihilation." (13) Was Monica's death not to be mourned? Was their no reason to be sad? He wrote, "My mother's death did, however, not arouse this special commiseration." Why not? She did not totally die. That was our conviction, guaranteed by her life and resting on a faith and certain rational arguments that were not mere fantasy." (14)

3 **Fear Death; Love Life**

When Augustine feels the end of his life approach, he has penitential psalms plastered on the wall of his bedroom on sheets of parchment. He leaves life while doing penance. He knew he would fail God's test, but he also knew that Christ had carried his guilt away and renewed his life. It was only through thanks to Christ's sacrifice that Augustine could now speak of a fulfilled life. He died just before the Vandals invaded Hippo Regius. "If you fear death, at least love life," he once said in a sermon. (15) It is in line with him when we consider this life as *the* Life: the Ruler of Life, *Christus Triomfator*." In the words of Augustine, "Believe and you will live, even if you have already died. If you don't believe, you are dead, even if you're still living." (16) In another sermon he once characteristically explained how we can survive death and how we are to regard it.

> We know that the dead do not leave us forever. No, for a short time they are ahead of us and then we will follow. But when death, the enemy of nature, takes away a loved one, in our love we mourn that person. That's why the Apostle Paul does not tell us not to mourn. No, it's only that we are not to mourn like the rest of mankind; they have no hope. Thus we mourn the death of our loves ones because we unavoidably lose them, but do so in the hope of seeing them again. The first makes us fearful; the second offers consolation. Our weakness makes us sick; our faith, better. Our human condition pains us; the promise of God heals. (17)

Augustine and Death

We can learn much from Augustine's interaction with death. In the first place, death digs in deep; it is an external enemy from without that threatens life and takes it. The manner in which death affects us on the one side says something about the relationship we had with the dead person, and on the other side, it says something about our vision of death. Death as either terminal station or as gateway makes a real difference, especially when expressing sorrow. He shows us two opposite reactions as examples to us. There is he, the man with the gift of tears, the sensitive church father of the West who pits death over against life and life against death. Mourning is allowed; loving is mandatory. Through death to life; facing and going through death; dying to death in order to live eternally. Augustine did not fully die. Put stronger, after his death he lives on—for eternity.

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Notes:

1 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 7 (vertaling van Gerard Wijdeveld).
2 Belijdenissen IV, 2, 2. 3 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 8. 4 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 9. 5 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 9.
6 Belijdenissen IV, 8, 13. 7 Belijdenissen IV, 6, 11. 8 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 10.
9 Belijdenissen IV, 4, 9.
10 Augustinus houdt het zelf op 56 jaar (Belijdenissen XI, 11, 28), tegenwoordig wordt ervan uitgegaan dat Monica leefde van 333-387. In dat geval was ze 53 of 54 jaar, afhankelijk van haar geboortedag.
11 Belijdenissen XI, 20, 26. 12 Belijdenissen IX, 12, 29. 13 Belijdenissen IX, 12, 29.
14 Belijdenissen IX, 12, 29. In deze formulering zien we Augustinus' weerzin ten opzichte van het manicheïsme terug ('gefantaseerd geloof') en zijn voorliefde voor de Griekse filosofie ('argumenten van de rede').
15 Augustinus (2011). Leven in hoop : Preken over teksten uit de brieven aan de christenen in Rome en Korinte [sermones de scripturis 151- 162B] / Aurelius Augustinus; ingeleid, vertaald en van aant. voorzien door Joke Gehlen-Springorum, Vincent Hunink, Six-Wienen en Hans van Reisen. Budel: Damon. Sermo 161, 7.
16 Augustinus, 365x Augustinus. Zijn mooiste citaten, Zoetermeer 2010, p. 85.

17 Augustinus (2013). Geloof is het begin [sermones de scripturis 162C183]; ingeleid, vertaald en van aant. voorzien door Gehlen-Springorum, Vincent Hunink, Six-Wienen en Hans van Reisen. Budel: Damon. Sermo 172.