

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

I. LOVE

[Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "Love," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, pp. 509-516]

Love, for Augustine, is an inclination, a movement, or a striving ("propter seipsam rem aliquam appetere; motus ad aliquid; ad aliquid moveri," *div. qu.* 35.1). Love is the force of the soul and the life. We live on the basis of our love, and love determines life in a good or evil way (*c. Faust.* 5.11). It flows from the dynamism of the will, which becomes concrete through the loved object. 'What is every love? Does it not consist in the will to become one with the object which it loves; and, when it reaches its object, becomes one with it?' (*ord.* 2.18.48). Love is a life coupling two realities, or trying to couple them: the lover and the loved object (*Trin.* 8.10.14). (AE, 509).

Why, then, is this said of Your Spirit only? Why is it said of Him alone? As if He had been in place who is not in place, of whom only it is written, that He is Your gift? In Your gift we rest; there we enjoy You. Our rest is our place. Love lifts us up there, and Your good Spirit lifts our lowliness from the gates of death. In Your good pleasure lies our peace. The body by its own weight gravitates towards its own place. Weight goes not downward only, but to its own place. Fire tends upwards, a stone downwards. They are propelled by their own weights, they seek their own places. Oil poured under the water is raised above the water; water poured upon oil sinks under the oil. They are propelled by their own weights, they seek their own places. Out of order, they are restless; restored to order, they are at rest. My weight is my love; by it am I borne wherever I am borne. By Your Gift we are inflamed, and are borne upwards; we wax hot inwardly, and go forwards. We ascend Your ways that be in our heart, and sing a song of degrees; we glow inwardly with Your fire, with Your good fire, and we go, because we go upwards to the peace of Jerusalem; for glad was I when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. There has Your good pleasure placed us, that we may desire no other thing than to dwell there for ever. (*Conf.* 13.9.10)

When one asks whether a human being is good, one does not ask what this person believes or hopes, but what he or she loves. The person who loves in the right way, undoubtedly believes and hopes in the right way. The person who does not love, believes in vain, even though the believed objects are true. The person who does not love, hopes in vain, even though the objects of his or her hope are a real part of true happiness. ... Although it is not possible to hope without love, it may happen that one does not love what is necessary to the attainment of the object of one's hope (*ench.* 31.117).

Love as Gift of God

Here lies the reason why natural love alone is not enough: for Augustine Christians have to love with the love given to them by the Holy Spirit. Our love must be inspired by divine love, and ought to mirror it. Love as a gift of God endows the human will with a new desire, a striving for divine truth, wisdom, and justice. Such a love excludes all that is sinful, namely, possessive or egotistic love, pretension, self-glorification, and seeking one's own profit. (AE, 514-4).

II. PRIDE

[J. Cavadini, "Pride," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, pp. 679-684].

Pride (*superbia*), for Augustine, is the archetypal sin, the original sin from which all other sin proceeds as from a root. In essence, pride is the desire to replace God with oneself. After the first sin of the devil and of Adam and Eve, it is rarely committed alone but is rather the form of all subsequent sin, obsessively reenacted in every particular sin. There are especially clear images of this sin, however, in time and history, mainly connected with institutions or movements: the lust for domination which characterized the Roman Empire; the lust for praise which characterizes the heroic Roman character as well as the ethos of the schools; and so forth.

Pride exerts a fascination or attraction or influence over all, in various ways, so that there is no one who is not in some way complicit. Pride alone, as originally committed, is merely a sin; the sins which follow are not only sins but punishments for the original sin (s. 198.33).

The Origin of Sin

Preaching in 411, Augustine warns the new bishop he has just ordained against pride: 'Pride is a great vice, and the first of vices, the beginning, origin and cause of all sins. It's what cast down an angel and made him into the devil. Pride was the cup which on being cast down he gave the Man, still standing up, to drink. ... He envied him, and persuaded him to ignore the law of God, and enjoy his very own power. And how did he persuade him? *If you eat*, he said, *you shall be like gods* (Gen 3:5). He had been made Man; he wished to be God (s. 340A.1; cf. *Trin.* 13.23).

Augustine frequently quotes his favorite verse on the point: 'What is the beginning of sin? Let scripture be questioned: *The beginning*, it says, *of every sin is pride* (Sir 10:13)' (s. 346B.3, ca. 410; cf. *civ. Dei* 12.6). Avarice, another scripture candidate for the origin of sin, is nevertheless a form of pride, and only as such is it the origin of sin: '*The beginning of every sin is pride*. How then is *avarice at the root of all evils* (1 Tim 6:10)? Because to want more than God is avarice, to want more than is enough is avarice. Only God, after all, is enough for the soul. ... But what could be prouder than to forsake God through overweening self-confidence? (s. 198.11; cf. *Trin.* 12.14). Envy, too, resolves itself into pride: 'Envy is a devilish vice, but it has its own proper mother; the mother of envy is called pride' (s. 399.7, ca. 398) because 'the proud person cannot help being envious' (s. 354.5, before 410).

Pride is ultimately apostasy, desertion of God: 'The whole cause ... of all the miseries which the human race suffers in this age, is nothing but pride. ... *The beginning of human pride is to apostatize from God* (Sir 10:12). ... It was pride, you see, that made Man apostatize from God' (s. 159B.11).

Pride as Self-Love

Pride is love of self, though not all self-love is evil. Pride is love of self as an alternative to God: 'The earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God' (*civ. Dei* 14.27); 'in one city love of God has been given first place, in the other, love of self' (*civ. Dei* 14.13). 'That is why the proud are given another name in holy Scripture; they are called *self-pleasers* [2 Pet. 2:10]' (*civ. Dei* 14.13). Proud self-love looks to the self as the source of delight and so as the final or ultimate Good.

Nearer to Nothingness

The incoherence of a culture which can imagine no other motivation for excellence than praise is one example of a more general principle, namely, that the more one appears to oneself to have come closer to the status of God in pride, the farther away from God one has fallen (*en. Ps.* 104.12) and the more disfigured one's humanity becomes. The image of God within is distorted, and one comes to resemble a

beast more than a person (*Trin.* 12.16). in loving the self as though it were God, one deprives one's self of its natural reference and purpose, which is to image God. Closed off from God, one mirrors ever more faithfully the nothingness or non-being which is the opposite of God. Since there is nothing to give ultimate happiness in the self, the body's desires come loose from any greater sense of contentment or satisfaction, and so take on a life of their own, dominating the soul in lusts which can never be fully satisfied (*civ. Dei.* 14.3; 19.25). The soul in pride mirrors God only as a parody (*conf.* 2.14) while it makes of itself not only a 'barren waste,' a 'land of want' (*conf.* 2.18), but a corruption and perversion of its own nature (*conf.* 3.16). Pride is often characterized as a disease, the fountainhead of all diseases (*Jo. Ev. Tr.* 25.16), the human soul's 'greatest ill' (s. 51.4), that which bars our way back to life (s. 142.2), a kind of swelling or tumor which is a caricature of genuine greatness (s. 380.2; 142.5; 124.3, etc.). Pride commits one to an 'unreality,' a fictional order which does not exist, a 'lie' (*civ. Dei* 11.13; 14.3; s. 197.1), and the prideful come closer to unreality and to fiction. They are a living lie, and come close to falling back into the nothingness out of which they were created (*civ. Dei* 14.13; cf. s. 141.2). Pride is a self-love which alienates the self from that which would make it happy and which thus renders itself an incoherence, closer to self-hatred (*Trin.* 14.18; *doc. Chr.* 1.23) or self-alienation (*Trin.* 10.7) than to any real self-love.

III. THE HUMILITY OF THE MEDIATOR

'Because our Lord Jesus Christ ... could see that pride was the root cause of all our disorders, he cured us with his own humility' (s. 159B.11; *Jo. Ev. Tr.* 25.16). This is one of the most characteristic themes in Augustinian theology. The incarnation of the Word of God is God's humility, God's humiliation (s. 160.7), the divinity at our feet (*conf.* 7.24) healing the swelling of our pride (*Trin.* 8.7; *doc. Chr.* 1.13). Once our world and our loves are dominated by pride, there is no going back: 'the sick never cure themselves' (s. 160.7); we can no longer imagine any other reality but one where our identities are constituted by the honor and prestige (or lack thereof) we have accumulated; where even our highest achievements—visions of God's beauty and truth—have no significance beyond the prestige they command. The self-willed humiliation of God is just what we need to unsettle the imagination, reordering our affections (*doc. Chr.* 1.16) into a way back to God, rousing us to love something beyond our own power to assign use and value, arresting our limited and empty vision on something real, the compassion of God, who was unashamed to put aside the power and prestige of divinity and to entrust himself to human testimony ('the Sun being illuminated by a lamp,' *Jo. Ev. Tr.* 2.8) and the hands of sinful men. Contemplating the incarnation in faith, we learn 'the great value that God places on us, and how much he loves us' (*Trin.* 13.13; 4.2), as well as how deeply we have sinned (since God has taken such extreme measures to recall us). Loving Jesus, our loves are reintegrated in gratitude to him (*civ. Dei* 10.29). We find ourselves clinging to the Wisdom which we had been avoiding all along, the Wisdom by which the world was ordered and against which we had been fixed in excessive rejoicing in our ability or order things. The Lord's death and resurrection 'harmonize' or reintegrate our being, as our inner self is crucified to the loves for which we had forsaken God and rises to renewal in the preference of justice over power (*Trin.* 4.6), and our outer self is granted an exemplum or model of the ultimate destiny prepared for us by God. The Mediator rescues us from the self-alienation and disintegration which pride always was.

Not all, however, are moved to humility by the sight of God's humble compassion. The Manichees (for example) are disgusted by the humility of God, disgusted by a God who somehow consented to be born of a woman, to be nailed to a cross and wounded (s. 159B.12), so they remain fixed in pride, content to ascribe their sin to a mythological evil nature (*c. Faust.* 22.22). The 'philosophers of this world' as well are too proud to board the wood of the cross, too proud to admit they need to be carried to the God of whom they have been granted a glimpse (*Trin.* 4.20; cf. s. 174.3). Platonic sensibilities are offended by the belief that God took on a body, the very thing the Platonists are trying to escape (*civ. Dei* 10.29; *Trin.* 4.18; s. 160.3), and all the learned, the accomplished who are proud of their

accomplishments and excellence, disdain to learn the Truth from unlettered fishermen. In the end it is only the grace of God which allows a person to be moved, rather than hardened, by the spectacle of God at his or her feet. The incarnation is itself the greatest example of grace (*ench.* 36; *Trin.* 13.24; s. 174.2). Without the doctrine of grace, faith itself, the very moment of being moved by the compassion of God, and the overcoming of sin will themselves become ‘excellences’ or ‘virtues’ about which to accrue praise (see, e.g., s. 239.4, etc.). The difference between the heroes and the martyrs (‘our heroes,’ *civ. Dei* 10.21) is that the martyrs and confessors ascribed their achievements to the grace of God (*civ. Dei* 5.14) and so resisted the otherwise irresistible pull toward self-congratulation and the quest of praise.

The effects of original sin, i.e. of pride, are never entirely healed in this life, but the more one is conformed to the cross in the hope of resurrection, the more one is ‘re-formed’ (Rom. 12:3) away from the ‘world,’ i.e., the whole order of power and love dominated by pride, and toward the compassion of God made present daily in the sacrifice of Christ, ‘the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, ... where it is shown that she herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God’ (*civ. Dei* 10.6). The Eucharist is in a way the counter-image of pride; instead of the obsessive reenactment and representation of the original sin, it is the continual representation and presence of the humility of God in the sacrifice of Christ. And since it is Christ’s sacrifice into which we are formed and not ultimately our own, the compassion we are molded to is ever and increasingly impervious to the contours and blandishments, the delights and pursuits, of the culture of praise.

IV. THE CHURCH

[J. Cavadini, ‘Sacramentality of Marriage in the Fathers’]

For Augustine, the transformation of desire is not in the first place a matter of education, either of oneself or, especially, of one spouse by the other, but rather of incorporation. Incorporation as a member of the Church into the Body of Christ is also, at least incipiently, an incorporation into Christ’s way of feeling, a configuration to his way of loving. It is impossible to acquire a complete picture of the “sacramentality of marriage” according to Augustine without considering first this primary notion of transformation-in-incorporation, especially because Augustine’s favorite biblical passages for explaining it are passages associated with marriage. In his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Augustine frequently comments to his listeners—so frequently that he expects them to know it before he says it—that the voice speaking in the Psalms is always Christ’s voice, even when the psalmist’s voice seems to be saying something that would seem unbecoming of Christ. Augustine’s listeners knew why this could be true, namely, because in the Psalms sometimes Christ speaks in the voice of his members, the members of his Body, and sometimes in the voice of himself, the Head. In a famous passage, Augustine is explaining that the title of Psalm 30 implies that the Psalm was spoken in fear, and then goes on to explain:

Whose fear? Christ’s certainly ... He who deigned to assume the form of a slave, and within that form to clothe us with himself, he who did not disdain to take us up into himself, did not disdain either to transfigure us into himself, and to speak in our words, so that we in our turn might speak in his. ... Facing death, then, because of what he had from us, he was afraid, not in himself, but in us. When he said that his soul was sorrowful to the point of death, we all unquestionably said it with him. Without him, we are nothing, but in him, we too are Christ.

It is the “bond of charity” that links the Head and members so intimately into one Body, that made the Head cry out, “‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’” (Acts 9.4) when Saul was obviously persecuting not the risen Jesus, but his members on earth.³¹ The charity or love of the Incarnation is compassion so radical that it generates a solidarity in which the Head takes on the sufferings of his

members, and speaks in their voice, on their behalf, and in so doing, “transfigures” the members into himself, identifying with them completely. Augustine points out that the Father never forsook the Son, even in the crucifixion, and yet the Son cried out, “Oh God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” speaking the Psalm verse in our flesh, making our situation of abandonment by God because of our sin his own, and yet in making this cry his own, he was “transfiguring it.” Our voice, our fear, our desolation, taken up by Christ’s compassion, becomes his, and our fear is transfigured so that when we give voice to it, our speech is Christ’s, that is, it is a remembrance of and an invocation of his compassion. Our very fear can be the place of contact with Christ’s compassion. “This is the wonderful exchange, the divine business deal, the transaction effected in this world by the heavenly dealer.” Voicing our own desolation, we are at the same time voicing Christ’s solidarity with our desolation, and so, at the same time, at least in faith and in hope, we are voicing our joy at being the objects of such compassion. We are, at least incipiently, feeling the joy of being espoused by Christ. “By a great sacrament (Eph. 5.31), these two were united in one flesh.” The Incarnation is the great “mystery” or “sacrament” in which Christ espoused the Church by taking on our flesh. Augustine’s favorite way of speaking of this intimate unity of Head and Body, the Church, is to say that they are “two in one flesh,” (Mt. 19.50). This way of talking, Augustine notes, is not meant to apply only to an ordinary human marriage because Paul says that the two in one flesh, the spouses in a marriage, “are a great mystery [*sacramentum*], but I am referring it to Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5.31-32). “So,” Augustine goes on to remark, “out of two people, one single person comes to be, the single person that is Head and body, Bridegroom and bride.”

V. THE CONTROVERSY ON GRACE

[P. Burns, *Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace*]

The first stage, from 326 on, has three distinctive features:

- (1) the starting point in the human person is the desire for the good, for completing in God;
- (2) God’s grace is seen as working through the circumstances in one’s life, and therefore, as external; and
- (3) he does not discuss predestination; rather, God’s congruous call (at best).

The second stage, from 412 on (especially after 418), against the Pelagians, clearly designates a double starting point: predestination (to conversion) and original sin /inclination to sin when the will is exercised, which includes the hardening of the heart. In this rendition, grace is seen as inward and transforming, and it works conversion. While one may be called to conversion, Augustine still nonetheless sees our ability to remain in the state of grace as something which is left to our good use of grace, (much like Aquinas’ position in the *Scriptum* with regard to perseverance). These two phases, though, share two important features with the Aquinas of the *ScG*: the operative grace of conversion which works internally from this second phase, and the exterior grace of providential circumstances for perseverance from the first phase.

It is in turning to Augustine’s third phase, from 426 on, against the so-called semi-Pelagians (Masillians), that we find the key insights which would lead Aquinas to the final changes found in the *Summa*. Augustine extends his understanding of one’s predestination to conversion to encompass eternal life; hence, the grace of conversion and perseverance are both subsumed under the category of predestination, thereby rendering them both operative and entirely gratuitous. This final phase entails a deeper realization of the reality of sin, even after conversion; it maintains the view that grace is inward and transformational (in addition to God working through providence); and is seen in the causal context of God’s predestining electing.

As regards these three stages, P. Burns uses three works in particular as the distinguishing markers of the three stages: (1) Stage One: *De diversis quaest*: characterized by external motives; (2) Stage Two: *Epistula 194 to Sextus*: characterized by conversion by internal grace and election; and (3) Stage Three: *De correptione et gratia*: combination of internal and external motives, election, and the operative grace of perseverance.

Discussion