

## Parting with Augustine: Historical Study and Contemporary Augustinianisms

JOSEPH LENOW\*

*Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis.*

By Michael Cameron. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 432 pp. \$74.00 (cloth).

*The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology.* Edited by C. C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom. T&T Clark Companions. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013. 304 pp. \$160.00 (cloth).

*Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide.* Edited by James Wetzel. Cambridge Critical Guides. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 280 pp. \$94.00 (cloth).

*Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology.* By Jesse Couenhoven. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 276 pp. \$74.00 (cloth).

*Image, Identity, and the Forming of the Augustinian Soul.* By Matthew Drever. AAR Academy Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 288 pp. \$74.00 (cloth).

*Parting Knowledge: Essays after Augustine.* By James Wetzel. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013. 304 pp. \$33.00 (paper).

Augustinian theology has tended to be suspicious of historical narratives. Writing history is an attempt to draw disparate moments into one coherent whole, to trace out the meaning or significance connecting a set of events. As Augustine displays on a world-historical level in *City of God*, and much more intimately in *Confessions*, this

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\* Joseph Lenow is a Ph.D. student at the University of Virginia. He works in the area of philosophical theology, and his current research focuses on the flesh of Christ in St. Augustine's Christology.

sort of storytelling is often riddled with self-deception, incomplete knowledge, and willful misrepresentations bent to one's own interest. Even so, one cannot avoid the burden of attempting to make sense of history, for it is the theater within which God has revealed Godself and acted to redeem humanity. Historical narratives thus occupy an ambiguous place for those who have taken St. Augustine of Hippo as a theological exemplar and attached themselves to his name; they are to be viewed as provisional and open to correction, yet are the irreplaceable means by which we come to understand God's work and our place in it.

The life of Augustine has been taken, for more than a millennium and a half now, as one particularly important history within which we can find our own, though the way the story is told has changed many times since his death in 430. Now is a particularly interesting moment in the broader history of Augustinian thought, as recent years have seen the emergence and mounting influence of a new narrative of Augustine's theological development, what some have called the "New Canon" reading.<sup>1</sup> This stream of interpretation has deep roots in post-*ressourcement* francophone interpretations of Augustine, especially the work of Goulven Madec and Tarcisius J. van Bavel.<sup>2</sup> Closer to Anglo-American home, Rowan Williams has proved a pivotal reference point—and in some cases, intellectual mentor—for the "New Canon" scholars.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in the mid-1990s, a series of articles and

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<sup>1</sup> The description of this approach as the "New Canon" reading comes from Michel René Barnes, "L. Ayres's *Augustine and the Trinity* and the New Canon Reading of Augustine" handout, AAR/SBL 2011; it appears in print for the first time, as far as I can tell, in Keith E. Johnson, "A 'Trinitarian' Theology of Religions? An Augustinian Assessment of Several Recent Proposals" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 2007), 179. See also Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 305–306.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Goulven Madec, *La patrie et la voie : Le Christ dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris: Desclée, 1989), and Tarcisius J. Van Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin: L'humain et le divin dans le Christ d'après saint Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1954). See also the frequently cited work of German-speaking scholars such as Basil Studer and Hubertus Drobner.

<sup>3</sup> Among the most important studies by Rowan Williams are "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*," in Bernard Bruning, ed., *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. Van Bavel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 317–332; "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De Trinitate*," in Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum, Collectanea Augustiniana* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 121–134; and "Augustine's Christology: Its Spirituality and Rhetoric," in Peter Martens, ed., *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early*

monographs by Michel René Barnes, Lewis Ayres, Robert Dodaro, and Luigi Gioia (among others) articulated this new approach, the defining features of which include:<sup>4</sup> (1) increased attention to the sermons and letters of Augustine as sources for reconstructing his doctrinal teachings; (2) recognition of Augustine's Trinitarian writings as largely polemical works directed especially against Latin Homoians; (3) foregrounding Augustine's exegesis over-against his appropriation of Neoplatonic philosophy as the determining feature of his Trinitarian thought; (4) viewing Christology as the epistemic presupposition of knowledge of the Triune God; and (5) situating Augustine within a fourth-century theological culture shared with the Greek fathers committed to the doctrines of divine simplicity, inseparable operations, and the monarchy of the Father, and accordingly rejecting an opposition between "Eastern" and "Western" approaches to Trinitarian theology. While this reading has been worked out primarily in the context of Augustine's Trinitarian thought, its implications for Christology and anthropology render it significant for nearly all aspects of Augustine interpretation. This sketch only begins to uncover the many sources of this reading, and does even less to signal the diversity that remains in the historical study of Augustine; even so, the "New Canon" reading has won many adherents among scholars of the early church, and increasingly seems to be the default reference point for appropriations of Augustine within systematic and philosophical theology.<sup>5</sup>

There are many virtues of this account: to name just a few, it has called attention to the importance of pre-Augustinian Latin sources in developing the pro-Nicene consensus of the fourth century; it has attuned scholars to the subtle developments in Augustine's Trinitarian theology, in part by calling attention to underutilized resources like

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*Church in Honor of Brian E. Daley, S.J.* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 176–189.

<sup>4</sup> I have condensed what I take to be the decisive features of this reading from the much more extensive list given by Barnes in his "New Canon Reading of Augustine" handout, 3.

<sup>5</sup> See, in addition to many of the works below, recent works by Sarah Coakley, Keith E. Johnson, John Milbank, Michael Hanby, Jason Byassee, Lydia Schumacher, Chad Tyler Gerber, and Matthew Levering. While their evaluation of the "New Canon" reading is not as positive as the sources listed above, Maarten Wisse in *Trinitarian Theology beyond Participation: Augustine's De Trinitate and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), and Phillip Cary's review of "Luigi Gioia, OSB, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2013): 315–317, present similar narratives and evaluations of the significance of the "New Canon" reading.

Augustine's sermons and letters; and it has countered historically unsophisticated readings of Augustine as privileging the divine substance over the divine persons in his theology. Yet it has also challenged some of the standard moves by which Augustine is placed in conversation with later medieval and even contemporary theology: what are we to do with an Augustine who has no account of subsistent relations in the Trinity? Such questions point to a deeper one about the proper relation of historical research to systematic and philosophical theology: as what Michael Cameron is unafraid to call the "historical Augustine"<sup>6</sup> comes into focus—or more conservatively, as one historical narrative of Augustine's theological development assumes increasing prominence within the field—how may contemporary theologians benefit from but productively depart from such historical reconstructions? What are the possibilities for crafting an Augustinian theology that is not simply a restatement of Augustine? Each of the volumes considered provides a window onto this question: the first book by Michael Cameron shows in more detail the sorts of theological questions raised by the "New Canon" reading; the five other books each model a historically-responsible approach to Augustinian theology that nevertheless charts a course beyond his thought.



Michael Cameron's *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* constitutes a substantial addition to the "New Canon" reading, extending the project in important ways and framing with especial clarity the constructive possibilities opened by this line of interpretation. At the heart of Cameron's study is the claim that Augustine's "thought on the humanity of Christ correlates with how he read Scripture figuratively."<sup>7</sup> He follows this connection between Christology and hermeneutics through three distinct phases of Augustine's development: first, as a lay Catholic thinker and recent convert from Manichaeism (386–391); second, as a priest (391–396); and finally, through the first half-decade of his episcopacy in Hippo Regius (396–c.400), characterizing Augustine's movement as a whole as a "fifteen-plus-year effort to overturn—and escape—the

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<sup>6</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 98.

Manichean understanding of Christ and Scripture.”<sup>8</sup> Augustine’s initial conversion to Catholic Christianity under the influence of Ambrose had been enabled, Cameron argues, by his training in rhetoric; Augustine increasingly came to view “God’s providential ordering of creation, history, and redemption” through the rhetorical notion of “‘arrangement’ (*dispositio*), in which an orator arranges the elements of a discourse.”<sup>9</sup> God has arranged the work of redemption such that the likenesses between the prophecies, prefigurations, and events of scripture invite us to consider them in light of one another; in so doing, we are drawn beyond the literal sense of these temporal signs and moved to consider spiritual realities. Christ serves as the center of this order of signification; because all other signs of both the Old and New Testaments finally point to him as the inner teacher who leads us from carnal to spiritual realities, his life serves as the principle enabling us to read the Old as a figure of the New. Yet at this early stage, Cameron argues that Augustine thinks “God became human primarily to carry out a program of spiritual instruction”—Augustine has not yet managed to describe how the flesh of Christ not only points us to the reconciliation of God and humanity, but accomplishes it.<sup>10</sup> Augustine’s views at this stage are still beholden to Manichaean patterns of christological thought—Jesus could still serve as an effective likeness and spiritual teacher without having assumed true flesh or having suffered on the cross.<sup>11</sup>

In the period of his priesthood, as he engages in an extensive engagement with St. Paul’s texts, Augustine becomes newly aware of the role that the *humanity* of Christ plays in effecting salvation, coming to believe that “Christ’s will-to-death gives what it portrays, and so makes all other events, words, and signs *sacramental* insofar as they partake of it.”<sup>12</sup> This insight redounds to his exegesis of the Old Testament: the cross “retroactively transforms”<sup>13</sup> the meaning of the Hebrew Bible, allowing Augustine to see in its words not only Christ’s voice, but the church’s voice also insofar as it is united to Christ in love. The final section of the book explores Augustine’s mature exegesis, calling attention to the differing emphases of his theological presentation

<sup>8</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 118; emphasis removed.

<sup>11</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 199.

<sup>13</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 208; emphasis removed.

depending upon whether he is addressing the spiritually advanced or beginners in the faith, and challenging the presumption that *De Doctrina Christiana* (as a work directed to the advanced) presents an adequate summation of his interpretive approach.

*Christ Meets Me Everywhere* is impeccably researched, carefully argued, and attuned to the nuances of Augustine's development in this period. Though the detail with which he presents Augustine's exegeses of individual texts threatens at times to distract from the broader lines of the book's argument, it is both likely and justly to become a standard reference-point for discussions of Augustine's hermeneutics and Christology in future years. More than this, Cameron displays how a textured historical presentation of Augustine can be generative of contemporary theological reflection. Some questions are left unanswered by Cameron's Augustine: what does it mean to see "the voice exchange between Savior and sinner" as "the very engine of human redemption,"<sup>14</sup> and what is the ontological basis of personal union between Christ and the church that renders this exchange more than signficatory? How does the work of the Holy Spirit enable this christological figurative exegesis? Though Christ does not become eschatologically disincarnate, does his flesh continue to mediate the Beatific Vision to us eternally? How should constructive theology attend to and incorporate in its work the exegetical basis of Christology? These questions, and many more, are raised by a study as detailed as Cameron's. To address them adequately will, in some cases, require moving beyond the limits of Augustine's text; the texts considered below offer possibilities for making this movement.



If the "New Canon" reading strives to locate Augustine in his proper historical context, *The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology* aims to give us a historicized Augustinianism. The essays here focus on the flexibility of that contested term, showing how various ages have taken up different elements of Augustine's thought, both casting new light on some aspects of his work and obscuring others. The book is written primarily for a student readership, and is structured in two different parts: the first offers a thematic introduction to Augustine's work, treating his Trinitarian theology,

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<sup>14</sup> Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 198.

theological anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, theology of scripture, and eschatology, while the second traces Augustine's relation to some of his most important interpreters, examining Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Henri de Lubac, and John Zizioulas. The individual essays succeed admirably, and by rather varied means: some offer incredibly rich distillations of much longer research projects perfect for student readers, as does Luigi Gioia's essay on the Trinity, or Anthony N. S. Lane's on Augustine and Calvin; others move in more constructive directions, as Michael Hanby suggestively develops Augustine's anthropology within a relational ontology, or as Phillip Cary extends his reading of Luther putting forward a properly sacramental account of the gospel proclamation in contrast to Augustine's wholly interior reception of grace.

Two of the essays here illuminate the possibilities of a volume of this sort. The first is Morwenna Ludlow's "Augustine on the Last Things."<sup>15</sup> On Ludlow's account, the history of twentieth-century engagements with Augustine's eschatology is mostly one of evasion, taking up his existential or teleological ordering to a final end while avoiding the particularly fleshly character of Augustine's resurrected bodies. Perhaps surprisingly, it is feminist interpreters like Virginia Burrus, Margaret Miles, and Susannah Cornwall that have best attended to the fleshly preoccupations of Augustine's eschatological texts. In so doing, they push his thought into new considerations of how "materiality paradoxically exceed[s] itself in the resurrection body,"<sup>16</sup> imagining the possibilities of a sexuality redeemed from its oppressive aspects, and considering what resources Augustine's writings on the wounds of the martyrs may provide for thinking about the resurrected bodies of the intersexed.

The second essay is C. C. Pecknold and Jacob Wood's "Augustine and Henri de Lubac," which sets out to reevaluate de Lubac's Augustinianism in light of the recent dispute between the postmodern Augustinianism of John Milbank and the resurgent Neo-Thomism of Lawrence Feingold.<sup>17</sup> The upshot of Pecknold and Wood's argument

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<sup>15</sup> Morwenna Ludlow, "Augustine on the Last Things," in Pecknold and Toom, *T&T Clark Companion*, 91–109.

<sup>16</sup> Ludlow, "Augustine on the Last Things," in Pecknold and Toom, *T&T Clark Companion*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> C. C. Pecknold and Jacob Wood, "Augustine and Henri de Lubac," in Pecknold and Toom, *T&T Clark Companion*, 196–222. While Feingold is the focus of Pecknold and Wood's interest, one might add the names of Steven A. Long, Ralph McIn-

is that one cannot understand the ostensibly twentieth-century debate surrounding de Lubac's positing a natural desire for God without understanding the contested receptions of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Scotus in the major religious orders of the pre-Reformation period, as each order developed a characteristic way of balancing God's intent to bring humanity to the Beatific Vision with the theological need to preserve the gratuity of grace. Pecknold and Wood suggest that de Lubac is most profitably read as a "neo-Aegidian," tracing his view back to the Augustinian friar Giles of Rome (*Aegidius Romanus*); in light of this reading, de Lubac can be seen to avoid both the paradoxicality of grace attributed to him by Milbank and the incoherence Feingold observes in his thought.<sup>18</sup> While this essay is more technical than most in the volume, it deftly weaves together a historicized notion of "Augustinianism" stretching from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries, reframing a vibrant debate in contemporary theology in the process.

While this volume helpfully introduces readers to some of the most important permutations of historical "Augustinianism," it is less successful at describing Augustine's place in our present theological setting. Although the book's title promises to situate Augustine within the landscape of modern theology, the range of its contemporary interlocutors is surprisingly narrow.<sup>19</sup> Henri de Lubac and Joseph Ratzinger are frequently referenced, as is John Milbank, but Ronnie Rombs's engagement with Karl Rahner and Roger Haight reads as boundary-pushing in this context.<sup>20</sup> With the exception of Morwenna Ludlow's contribution, there is no sustained engagement with the appropriations and critiques of Augustine found in feminist, womanist, black, queer, postcolonial, ecological, or liberation theologies. Those seeking insight into Augustine's contested place in these vibrant modern discussions will thus find this volume regrettably incomplete; even so, it is an eminently useful introduction to the reception of his thought across a wide swath of Christian history.

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erny, Thomas Joseph White, Reinhard Hütter, and Romanus Cessario to the list of exponents of a "ressourcement Thomism" that is skeptical of de Lubac's claims of a natural desire for God.

<sup>18</sup> Pecknold and Wood, "Augustine and Henri de Lubac," in Pecknold and Toom, *T&T Clark Companion*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> One factor contributing to this focused set of conversation partners may be a common institutional outlook: six of the volume's thirteen contributors are affiliated with the Catholic University of America.

<sup>20</sup> Ronnie Rombs, "Augustine on Christ," in Pecknold and Toom, *T&T Clark Companion*, 47–53.





*Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, edited by James Wetzel, proceeds quite differently, but is no less effective at pointing the reader toward the possibilities of contemporary Augustinian reflection. The structure of the book plays a key role here. Though often making reference to other works of Augustine, all the essays here take *City of God* as the focus of investigation; the circumscribed scope leads to a sense of ready conversation between the various contributions. Facilitating the discussion is the decision to present the essays as matched sets, with two or three each devoted to similar topics treated in the *City*: and so Paul Griffiths and Peter Iver Kaufman each deal with questions of the church's pilgrimage through the world; Margaret Miles and John Cavadini focus on the graces and dangers of embodied life; Jennifer Herdt, Sarah Byers, and Nicholas Wolterstorff each engage classical conceptions of virtue and Augustine's critique of them; Wetzel and John Bowlin address the protological and eschatological implications of the Fall; and, bookending the volume, Mark Vessey and John Rist establish Augustine as an inheritor of the classical tradition while Bonnie Kent severs him from the medieval context within which he is often situated.<sup>21</sup> Considering the distinction of the contributors, it should come as no surprise that the essays are uniformly rewarding. A quick look at two of them will clarify how this volume encourages its readers to seek out different and complementary Augustinianisms.

Jennifer Herdt's and Sarah Byers's chapters both begin by considering a "failure of compassion."<sup>22</sup> For Herdt, it is the misshapen desire cultivated by the pagan theater in *City of God* Book 2; for Byers, it is the Stoic philosopher in Aulus Gellius, who in *City of God* 9.5 is able to feel fear at his own impending death but not compassion for others beset by vice. From here, the essays pursue quite different courses. Herdt's attention to the theater opens onto a broader discussion of mimesis: while many of our imitations, including those of the pagan theater and the great heroes of Rome, are motivated in significant part by "the human tendency . . . to seek in ourselves and in the

<sup>21</sup> Wetzel's introduction does a nice job of laying out the connections between these essays; see James Wetzel, "Introduction," in Wetzel, *City of God*, 5–13.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase comes from Herdt's essay, "The Theater of the Virtues: Augustine's Critique of Pagan Mimesis," in Wetzel, *City of God*, 116.

world what we can only find in God,”<sup>23</sup> the liturgy and stories of the martyrs suggest another type of imitation in which, by the grace of the Incarnation, “the love at the heart of our being works to reunite copy with exemplar.”<sup>24</sup> In the light of this latter form of mimesis, even the heroic (and by tentative extension, theatrical) displays of Rome can serve as inspirations to the Christian—“there is finally no bright line to mark off graced from ungraced.”<sup>25</sup>

Byers’s essay, on the other hand, attempts to clarify and refine the precise failure of Stoicism that Augustine takes himself to have discerned in Aulus Gellius—a pressing problem, as the Stoic theory “is formally similar to the cognitive model of emotional therapy found to be clinically effective today.”<sup>26</sup> Showing that Augustine is a more subtle reader of Stoicism than is often recognized, their root failures seem to be first that “they have a fear of intimacy, because of the vulnerability to pain that it brings,”<sup>27</sup> and that they lack a sufficiently developed notion of “human dignity”<sup>28</sup> to justify grief over damage done to the body and soul. Augustine’s reformulation of Stoic cognitive psychology corrects these defects while retaining the fundamental connection between rationality and the emotions, such that “accountability for the emotions will still be possible, and the use of cognitive therapies will still be relevant.”<sup>29</sup>

The important feature to note in comparing these essays is that both begin in a similar place (the failure of compassion) and end with similar prescriptions (a view of the human person opened to relation with God and the world by grace), yet these common outlooks are turned to the pursuit of very different constructive aims. Herdt aims to chasten Christian presumptions that true virtue is limited to those within the bounds of the church, while Byers is concerned to read Augustine as a possible ally of contemporary psychological therapies by virtue of his debt to Stoicism. Rather than overwhelming the historical study, these modern concerns are used to focus it on particular

<sup>23</sup> Herdt, “The Theater of the Virtues,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 117.

<sup>24</sup> Herdt, “The Theater of the Virtues,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Herdt, “The Theater of the Virtues,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Byers, “The Psychology of Compassion: Stoicism in *City of God*,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 132.

<sup>27</sup> Byers, “The Psychology of Compassion,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Byers, “The Psychology of Compassion,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 142–147; Byers occasionally glosses “human dignity” as “ontological goodness,” as on 146.

<sup>29</sup> Byers, “The Psychology of Compassion,” in Wetzel, *City of God*, 148.

features of Augustine's moral psychology that might otherwise be overlooked. By placing these essays alongside one another, the volume displays the versatility of Augustine's theology as a resource for contemporary thought.



These themes find further expression in Jesse Couenhoven's monograph *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ*. Couenhoven directs his attention to one of the most contentious aspects of the Augustinian tradition—Augustine's teaching on original sin—beginning with the fundamental question of “how one can be, as the doctrine suggests, responsible for sin that could not have been prevented or avoided.”<sup>30</sup> Its first part offers a careful historical reconstruction of Augustine's own thought on original sin, seeking to counter several seductive misreadings of the doctrine. Drawing especially on Augustine's latest (and often overlooked) works against the Pelagians, Couenhoven sets forth a compatibilist account of freedom (*libertas*) as the proper orientation of one's will to God, enabled by grace. We remain morally responsible even after original sin because “we have nothing that we have not received—but what we have received we really have; it is our own,”<sup>31</sup> an affirmation that holds true of humanity's original created state, its condition under sin, and the healing of its will by grace.

In the second, constructive section of the work, Couenhoven develops his own “doctrine of original sins” through engagement with analytic moral philosophy and feminist thought. One of the goals of this account is to retain Augustine's central insight of a compatibilist view of responsibility without his seemingly problematic ideas about a historic fall, the damnable guilt of infants, and the transmission of sin through reproduction. Couenhoven grounds attributions of responsibility in an account of “proper function,” understood as “at least a minimal level of coherence and connection between [one's] beliefs and loves, enough to form views and attitudes that can have epistemic merits like rationality, justification, and reliability.”<sup>32</sup> We inherit these “original sins” like sexism and racism before we are morally responsible (infants are insufficiently reason-responsive), yet we find they

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<sup>30</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 149.

have already deformed our agency by the time we are responsible agents. Humans thus remain responsible for the sinful patterns of willing and loving into which they are born, even if these deformations were not consciously chosen: "Patriarchy, for example, is not simply a choice individuals make but a way of seeing and being in the world; for those raised in it, sexism becomes second nature."<sup>33</sup> In recognizing that many of the beliefs and desires for which we are responsible are beyond our control, Couenhoven hopes that we might learn humility and forgiveness in our relations to one another and to God: "Our evils may often be involuntary, but so too are our goods."<sup>34</sup>

There is much to commend this account. Couenhoven lucidly presents an Augustinian conception of freedom and responsibility in the idiom of analytic moral philosophy, and in so doing, articulates a significant challenge to the libertarian account of freedom so entrenched in contemporary philosophy of religion. Yet this book is especially instructive as an example of theological methodology in its appropriation of history. It is precisely Couenhoven's textured historical work in the first part of the book that underlies his often significant departures from Augustine in the second. This is no simple attempt to remain "true to the spirit" of Augustine's account of original sin. First, Couenhoven maps out in quite detailed fashion the logical connections between the primal sin of Adam and Eve, humanity's existence and sin "in Adam," the presence of an inherited flaw in human agency, the guilt assigned to original sin, the mechanism of sin's transmission,<sup>35</sup> and beliefs about baptismal regeneration, grace, and predestination<sup>36</sup> in Augustine's own writings. Only afterwards does he begin to ask which elements can be detached from one another without corrupting the fundamental Augustinian insight that one can be responsible for inherited sin. The constructive proposal follows the logical form of the exegesis, attempting to sever at the joints the pieces of Augustine's presentation that require emendation.

One might still find individual points of disagreement with Couenhoven's account: his arguments against attributing moral responsibility to the mentally ill seem to me overly confident in our ability to determine what counts as "proper function" through introspection,

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<sup>33</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 202.

<sup>34</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 58.

betraying a lingering moral rationalism.<sup>37</sup> Though he notes at times that human self-understanding is not fully coherent (as on page 148), I suspect that the incoherence of our lives—our beliefs, loves, and self-understanding—runs much deeper than we know; and if this is the case, moral responsibility may extend even to paradigm cases of an incoherent experience of oneself like that of the schizophrenic. Say that an utterly reason-unresponsive schizophrenic commits a series of murders, but is afterwards miraculously healed: are we really so confident that she need not seek divine forgiveness for her murders? In any case, both Couenhoven's careful interpretative work and bold constructive work distinguish this book as a model for further engagements with Augustine's thought.



If Couenhoven's book uses patient exegesis to map out the points at which one may diverge from Augustine ostensibly without loss, Matthew Drever takes a different approach: in *Image, Identity, and the Forming of the Augustinian Soul* he views historical research as identifying the loose ends in Augustine's thought that can be taken up and bound together in a constructive project. One might see this as an application of the "spirit and the letter" principle: Drever departs from Augustine inasmuch as he extends the latter's thought in the direction of systematicity. Drever is throughout deeply influenced by the "New Canon" reading of Augustine, and brings many of that approach's virtues to his own writing. His interpretations display expansive knowledge of Augustine's texts, and are impressively attuned to the subtleties of his Latin, adding up to a book marked by analytic clarity and precision.

Drever aims to recover an Augustinian view of the self that has been obscured by modernist misreadings, taking as his central texts *De Genesi ad litteram* and *De Trinitate*.<sup>38</sup> Yet rather than focusing on the specific capacities of created human nature that constitute the *imago Dei* for Augustine, Drever seeks to show it in action, following "the movement of creation from nothing to the goodness of existence . . . in which all creatures continually turn to God in praise and love

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<sup>37</sup> See Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 148–159.

<sup>38</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 2.

to enact the fundamental currents of their existence.”<sup>39</sup> This project propels him into a series of illuminating discussions on the abiding significance of humanity’s origin in nothingness, the importance of vision—and especially images of the crucified Christ—in leading us both to sin and redemption, and the very different ends toward which Augustine and Descartes turn their epistemic doubt. Drever’s argument culminates in the claim that “the core of the human soul is its response to God’s creative act, which finds its foundation in a basic act of worship—the opening and going out of the creature—that echoes in the daily, spiritual activities of the Christian.”<sup>40</sup> In Augustine’s view of the human person, one exists only as one actively relates and is related to God; there is no room here for the separated, static, and interiorized view of the person often attributed to the doctor of grace. It is especially appropriate that a book focused upon the relationality that characterizes human existence should so compellingly illustrate the deep connections between many aspects of Augustine’s thought.

Drever’s use of modern sources is instructive. For the most part, he engages them at the end of his chapters, after he has already dwelt for quite some time with Augustine’s own texts and attuned us to their dynamics. Recent thinkers provide Drever with philosophical distinctions that can be used to press Augustine toward greater clarity, or point out directions in which Augustine’s germinal ideas on a subject may be extended. So, for example, chapter 2 engages feminist and ecological theology to display how Augustine maintains an “ontological break”<sup>41</sup> between matter and intellectual souls, even as he holds a much more complex view than the simple dualism for which he is often chided, while chapter 3 draws upon recent phenomenological and postmodern philosophy to foreground Augustine’s hesitance to use the language of substance, thus challenging a reading that casts him as beholden to a “substance metaphysic.” Chapter 6 bolsters Augustine’s underdetermined use of the language of deification by presenting it as the mirror image of God’s kenotic “downward participation” in humanity through the Incarnation.<sup>42</sup> Throughout, Drever endeavors to make clear the points at which his conclusions go beyond what can be established in Augustine’s text.

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<sup>39</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 166.

<sup>41</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 162.

In light of Michael Cameron's book, however, one limitation of the text does become apparent. At times, Drever seems overly influenced by Jean-Luc Marion's post-metaphysical reading of Augustine, as when he writes, "In Augustine there is not so much a systematic repudiation of the metaphysics of being as a suspicion toward spiritual practices that move from the visible and manifest creation to the invisible and mysterious God."<sup>43</sup> While Augustine's later works undoubtedly have a character that is much different from his more Platonically inflected early writings, Drever's suspicion of metaphysics leads him to neglect the sense in which all created realities are signs of the incarnate Word. In humanity's sinful state, contemplation of the world appears primarily as an opening to temptation, and so one must flee to Christ. True enough—but absent recognition that all created things may serve as figures of the Word, Drever ends up with a picture of the spiritual life so focused on affective union with Christ that *other* worldly realities cannot be used to lead to the enjoyment of God. Yet in spite of this, Drever has given us one of the more compelling systematic presentations of Augustine's thought of recent years, and is a welcome guide to how Augustinian theology might constructively engage a wealth of contemporary theological approaches.



Perhaps the most striking model of how one might fruitfully disagree with Augustine is given in James Wetzel's new collection of essays, *Parting Knowledge: Essays after Augustine*. This incredibly rich anthology gathers many of the pieces Wetzel has written mostly over the last decade, which makes its cohesiveness as a single-volume work all the more remarkable. The essays are gathered into two parts: the first seven essays focus on Augustine himself, and cover a range of themes including original sin, the freedom of the will, his theology of the emotions and critique of Stoicism, and his transformation of Platonism in light of the Incarnation. In the latter seven essays, Wetzel turns his attention to thinkers who stand in Augustine's shadow, including Anselm, Dante, Kant, Freud, and Wittgenstein.

Though the scope of these essays is incredibly broad, Wetzel maintains a significant degree of thematic continuity by returning repeatedly to a few key scriptural and Augustinian texts; his handling

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<sup>43</sup> Drever, *Augustinian Soul*, 178.

of them provides the best window into his purposes. Wetzel's essays tend to find their argumentative home in the *regio dissimilitudinis* of *Confessions* 7.10.16—the “place of unlikeness” into which Augustine is caught in his first glimpse of God's eternity. This view of oneself is profoundly destabilizing on Wetzel's reading: “There are three points of reference to this assumption from within: the God who beckons, the real world, and the self who is neither with the one nor part of the other. Not yet.”<sup>44</sup> It is not simply that we have not yet been made into what we will become—just as importantly, we cannot yet see the creatures that we are. In his inability to find himself either in God or in his own flesh (and how could he know the one without the other?), Augustine is left trying to ground his identity in the “place [that] is nowhere, occupied by no one; it is outside of the logical space of being.”<sup>45</sup>

If we are to be with God and become part of the real world, we must learn what sorts of creatures God has given us to be, and so Wetzel is led back over and over again throughout these essays to the creation narratives of Genesis. The themes he draws out of the narratives of Creation and Fall are too rich to admit of easy treatment: the fact of finding one's own life in the flesh drawn from one's mother, and receiving this knowledge anew as a parent; the Fall as issuing from our fidelity to the flesh that God will one day assume; the recognition that our “theft lies in affecting to take from God what only God can bestow: a fruitful way of desiring.”<sup>46</sup> All this culminates in a remarkable essay on forgiveness that forms the hinge between the two halves of the book. For Wetzel, forgiveness comes not after the sin but before it, founding the very possibility of existence: “When I try to imagine what can be absolute and original about an incarnate life, I think of a being who has fully accepted being human before any one of us has. If this being is God, then the time the rest of us have to become incarnate is still before us. Forgiveness is what we begin with.”<sup>47</sup> A reconciled life is thus at one with God in being at one with the flesh, embracing it in all its finitude and mortality.

What this brief summary fails to express is the tentativeness and self-interrogation with which Wetzel advances these arguments, and which is so central to his use of Augustine here. From the outset,

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<sup>44</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 95.

<sup>47</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 153.



Wetzel positions himself as a “student” of Augustine,<sup>48</sup> seeking to inhabit the “confessional mode” characterized by dispossession, receptivity, and responsive offering.<sup>49</sup> It is precisely his fidelity to Augustine’s own self-questioning that puts Wetzel in the position of “arguing Augustine against himself”<sup>50</sup> at several key junctures in the text, setting what he takes to be a more fundamentally Augustinian insight over-against the letter of Augustine’s writings. Though the standards by which Wetzel identifies these moments requiring correction are not always clear, they tend to counter some of Augustine’s more dogmatic assertions, seeking to return us to the *regio dissimilitudinis* where we are being made and remade. This method of parting with Augustine can produce sometimes radical results—at times in these essays, Wetzel seems so committed to thinking from within the limits of created fleshliness that it is difficult to see what the notion of incorruptible flesh could be except an expression of humanity’s desire to flee from the conditions of our embodiment. Yet it is crucial to note that these are never simply rejections of Augustine’s thought: “even his slip at confession is illuminating,”<sup>51</sup> Wetzel notes. By striving above all to remain true to the deepest currents of Augustine’s thought, Wetzel has produced a volume among the richest and most rewarding in recent theology.



From the standpoint of these works, what may we say more broadly about the contemporary state of Augustinian theology? Above all, its outstanding feature seems to be the diversity of approaches one finds in the use of Augustine. While one may perhaps be inclined to take this fact for granted, a comparative glance across the theological landscape proves illuminating. Relatively few theological subfields are devoted to the study of a single figure: preeminent among them on the American scene are research on Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth. While the shared presuppositions underlying these theological dispositions can create many fruitful conversations, such fields also tend to gravitate toward scholasticism. The correct theological

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<sup>48</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> For more on the “confessional mode,” see especially chapters 2 and 13 of *Parting Knowledge*.

<sup>50</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge*, 241.

position is elided with the correct reading of one's chosen standard-bearer, and so the real work is carried out at the level of interpretation. The situation is not, in fact, quite as dire as this among even the most committed Augustinians, Thomists, or Barthians, though it strikes me as a tendency to guard against in all three outlooks. Even so, the field of Augustinian studies has managed to maintain an impressive degree of heterogeneity in approach and opinion when measured against students of Thomas and Barth. If this leaves the Augustinian tradition feeling relatively less coherent at times, it has nevertheless allowed for more porous boundaries with other theological conversations, as attested to in the volumes considered above.

What remains to be seen is whether the "New Canon" of historical scholarship on Augustine will foster or restrain this diversity of outlook in contemporary Augustinian theology. I believe it offers both opportunities and temptations in this regard. As Michael Cameron's book has shown here, and as the many theological works making use of Ayres and Barnes have previously established, such historical research is fertile ground for systematic theologians. The "New Canon" reading has played a significant part in returning Augustine to the heart of contemporary discussions of Trinitarian thought and Christology. It has also helped identify and undermine misreadings or mischaracterizations of Augustine commonly found in less historically grounded works of theology. On the other hand, as the "New Canon" reading becomes more and more widely accepted in the field, it may foster the scholastic impulse within Augustinianism, leading to considered departures from or appropriations of Augustine being dismissed as simple misreadings. It is therefore useful to be clear-eyed about where historical claims end and theological claims begin: the "New Canon" scholarship is a powerful tool in drawing the distinction, and the works considered above serve as models for moving productively from one side of it to the other.