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(Dis)owning Constantinian Christianity

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From 1970 until he took leave of the terrestrial city over forty years later, Robert Markus informed and enlivened our discussions of Constantinian Christianity. His impressive erudition still does. He was especially and insightfully concerned with the period "during which Christian Romans came slowly to identify themselves with traditional Roman values, culture, practices, and established institutions."[1] And he identified the world in which that assimilation "slowly" occurred as "the secular." His readers were used to that assimilation in their time--our time-- having heard references to civil religion, so Markus could well have been considered to be politically correct, and a number of his colleagues have argued that he was also historically correct.[2]

Yet Markus controversially enlisted Latin Christianity's prolific paladin, Augustine of Hippo Regius, into the service of the secular, as it were, because the African bishop purportedly

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[1] Markus, "The Secular in Late Antiquity," in <u>Les frontiers du profane dans l'antiquité tardive</u>, ed. Éric Rebillard and Claire Sotinel (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2010), 358.

[2] Charles Taylor, <u>A Secular Age</u> (Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press, 2007), 86-88 traces to the late Renaissance the "disciplined reordering of life and society," which disenchanted the world, distinguished the elite's ideals of piety and civility from those of ordinary Christians, and made possible the new self-understandings and practices, which, to his mind, define secularity. In this connection, also see Brad Gregory, <u>The Unintended Reformation</u> (Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press, 2012). For earlier secularization as "liberation", see Markus's <u>Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 173.

sanctioned neither his faith's repudiation nor its usurpation of the world around it. What required

repudiation, Markus (and his Augustine) claimed, was the profane or unacceptable. "The neutral

realm of the acceptable" was "the secular." Living in Constantine's shadow--and especially after

Emperor Theodosius I emphatically proscribed pagan worship--Christians of the late fourth and

early fifth centuries found it hard to conceive of municipal or imperial politics as alien and, in

Markus's terms, to perceive the secular as profane; the empire "had become the vehicle of their

religion and its natural political expression." Participation in political culture was by no means

compulsory. "Christians could treat [it] as secular," Markus alleged, "perhaps distancing

themselves but without feeling a need to disown and condemn it."[3]

What of the other options, usurpation and repudiation? Markus associated the first with

the medieval papacy, making Pope Gregory I responsible for the desecularization of the secular.

Gregory allegedly inspired many of his successors in Rome, the papal hierocratic theorists, and

most influential canon lawyers to "swallow . . up the world."[4] Markus could have selected the

usurpers' medieval critics as examples of repudiation, but often cited instead the contemporary,

radical evangelical view" of, among others, John Howard Yoder. Radical evangelical protests

against Gregorian Christianity stipulated that "the church desert[s] its vocation" whenever it

celebrates its "Constantinian status."[5]

We begin in 314, by assessing that status and "celebration" shortly after Emperor

Constantine's apparent conversion to Christianity, specifically, we will consider what Markus

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[3] Markus, "Secular in Late Antiquity," 253-59.

[4] Markus, Christianity and the Secular (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press, 2006), 86.

[5] Yoder-- etc-- stipulation Markus, 2006--pp. 24-28. Also for earlier protests predate gregory-- too cosy, ascetic takeover markus, end of ancient Christianity.

and his Augustine believe to be secular spaces that Constantinian changes opened between the sacred and profane. My aim is to raise questions about the church's mission, to ask whether and how the church can agitate in the world without losing its distinctiveness. Arguably, "agitate" is too strong a term, yet disturbances would have seemed inevitable when moral clarity, which faith ostensibly imparts to the faithful, was released into the secular where, as historian and ethicist Chuck Mathewes cautions, situations are "always morally ambiguous," at best, or where, at worst, the world is infectiously wicked, as Augustine once claimed--in hoc saeculo maligno.[6]

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *</p>

Soon after his apparent conversion to Christianity, Emperor Constantine was persuaded that wickedness infected many African Christian clerics, who persevered in opposition to Bishop Caecilian of Carthage. Qui vis malignitatis in eorundum pectoribus perseverat.[7] They challenged the validity of Caecilian's appointment and consecration, and after several European colleagues endorsed both, his adversaries, in effect, seceded from African Christian churches, whose bishops thought the accusations against Caecilian libelous. Before more formal secession, dissidents urged Proconsul Anulinus to deny Caecilian and his partisans the exemptions Constantine had awarded his new faith's clergy. Anulinus referred the matter to the emperor who, in turn, directed the bishop of Rome to confer with other Italian prelates and investigate petitioners' accusations. Bishop Miltiades complied, assembled eighteen others, probed the cause

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[6] Aug reference for in hoc saeculo maligno--use quote-- Mathewes, The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 214-15.

[7] Documents related to the origins of the African schism are conveniently printed in Le Dossier du Donatisme, vol. 1, ed. Jean-Louis Maier (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1987). For vis malignitatis, see Constantine's epistolary response to the Arles determinations, 169.

of dissidents' discontent--Caecilian's alleged collaboration with Christianity's persecutors during the previous persecution--and vindicated the accused. With Caecilian and his partisans acquitted, Miltiades and his colleagues probably looked to appease dissidents by also declaring that bishops they had ordained were not to be denied authority. According to a proposal formulated in Rome, wherever opposition to Caecilian split a town's church in two, seniority would dictate which of the rival bishops remained in his see and who relocated. But that arrangement did not satisfy Caecilian's African adversaries. They defiantly demanded that the emperor reconsider their original complaints. In 314, he called a second and larger conference at Arles. Constantine's capitulation to the dissidents' demands set aside the decisions reached in Rome, but bishops assembled at Arles reaffirmed the Caecilianists' position, and the emperor agreed that the rage against Caecilianists was irrational. Constantine also concluded that his intervention had been appropriate or, to borrow the term Markus used to describe "the secular," "acceptable."

The secular had weighed in, ordering and endorsing resolution of a crisis that the sacred seemed unable to contain. The Arles verdict and imperial approval were apparently expected to marginalize if not douse dissent. But dissidents soon consecrated as bishop of Carthage Donatus, a resourceful leader who masterminded a campaign that, within a century, gave secessionists' churches--the pars Donati or Donatists--a commanding position in several African provinces.[8]

Donatists' successes during the fourth century will concern us soon enough--when they concern Augustine in the 390s and thereafter, but we need now to infer what little we can about Emperor Constantine's involvement combatting what he perceived to be the "wickedness" from

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[8] Donatus was long after known as the prelate who purged Carthage of aberrant practices; see Augustine, Contra Cresc 3. 56, 22.

which the African schism originated. His biographer Eusebius reported that he deliberated with

the bishops, if not in Rome in 313, then in Arles the next year. Augustine repeated the story, but

evidence suggests that the emperor did little more than nominate a few bishops to participate in

the conversations in Rome and that he may have been in Trier while the Council of Arles met.

The wisest course, I suspect, is to follow Brent Shaw's lead, wagering that, whatever we may

subsequently discover about Constantine, Shaw's conclusion that the bishops at Arles (and at

Rome) vindicated Caecilian and condemned his critics "at the prompting of the emperor and his

advisers" will not require amending.[9]

But Constantine and his councils failed. Nearly eighty years later, when Augustine

resettled in Africa, Donatist Christians outnumbered the Caecilianists. Constantine pledged to

enforce decisions taken at Arles. He promised to travel to Africa and make it clear "what sort of

devotion" would please God and to compel the dissidents to conform to "the most perfect faith."

The emperor explained that statesmen had no greater obligation than to eradicate religious error

and encourage the faithful to defer to their legitimate bishops' authority.[10] W. H. C. Frend refers

to Constantine's intervention as "one of the decisive moments in the history of the early church,"

as "one of the major steps which brought about the alliance between Catholic church and Roman

empire." Granting that the political significance of the emperor's sentiments and strategy is hard

to exaggerate, however, one must also concede that the outcome seems not to have been what he

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[9] Brent D. Shaw, Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62. H. A. Drake, Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 218-19 details the emperor's and Miltiades's influence on participation in 313; Timothy Barnes, The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 71 reconstructs Constantine's itinerary for 314. For the suggestion that the emperor deliberated with the bishops, see VC 1.44 and Augustine ep. 43.5

[10] Constantine's letter to Chrestus, Maier, Dossier, 195-96.

expected. Caecilianists at Arles endorsed what he wanted, "a harmonious and smoothly running coalition in which [Christians] would serve" as secular magistrates. But Donatists were durable, intransigent, and--soon enough--separatists. Hence, the religious situation in one of the empire's most important regions got terribly untidy.[11]

That outcome (or untidiness) sets the stage for Augustine's appearance in this paper, but it--and the practical advantages Constantine likely anticipated--should not be allowed to obscure remarks that suggest the emperor's religious motivation. God's favor, he wrote, was conditional. Constantine intervened in the African churches' dispute because he believed that God entrusted him, terrena omnia, with all earthly affairs, including church controversies about cultic practices. The secular and sacred were one.[12]

Yet the emperor's intervention was limited after 314. The schism in Africa ceased to be of considerable concern. Constantine turned his attention to the east, never fulfilling his promise to travel come to Africa and compel conformity. And, as Peter Brown has maintained, "far from bringing doctrinal controversies to an end [emperors' pronouncements] were usually the opening shot in a campaign for the mastery of public opinion. In the fifth century, the shambling Roman Empire was far from being like a modern state, and the so-called Catholic Church was a loose-knit confederation of local churches, which resembled in no way the papal monarchy of later centuries."[13] Hence, Augustine took it upon himself to work locally, hold conversations with

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[11] Compare Frend, The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 147 with Drake, Constantine, 230-31.

[12] Constantine's letter to Aelafius, Maier, Dossier, 157-58.

[13] Brown, "Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation," Philosophical Books 43 (2002), 195-96.

Donatist bishops, circulate records of what was said, and to "master" public opinion without interference from zealots intent on upstaging statesmanlike conferees to attract the unwanted attention of secular authorities.[14]

In the late 390s and into the next century, Augustine avoided virulently arraigning the secessionists whose responses and refutations would only prolong the controversy. Historian Emilien Lamirande noticed that Augustine declined to dress up his arguments for the current "climate" in Africa, which was hardly conducive to reconciliation. His subsequent reliance on the secular government to end the schism would represent "a decisive volte-face," but initially Augustine was content to offer rules of engagement that had the prospect of restoring unity to African Christianity.[15] He knew that many Donatists remained, as he may have said, shackled, that is, committed to the truth of indictments that had failed to convince European prelates at Rome and Arles of Caecilian's unsuitability for office; by the time Augustine started writing against them, several generations of Donatists refused to accept that their leaders had libeled colleagues, in 313 and 314, and had insisted on recycling the charges.[16] Yet, in Proculeianus, Augustine detected sounder judgment and, what was equally important, an irenic spirit (in te praeeminent placidoris mentis indicia) and a dedication to end the schism. Ideally, similarly disposed Donatists could be found to free African churches from the discord that perversely plagued the faith Christians shared (a perversitate discordiae liberemur).[17]

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[14] See Augustine's letter to Donatist Proculeianus, 396, epist. 33.4.

[15] Émilien Lamirande, "Aux origines du dialogue interconfessionnel: Saint Augustin et les donatistes, vingt ans de tentatives infructueses (391 - 411)," Studia canonica 32 (1998), 205.

[16] Augustine's letter to Eleusis and others, 397, epist. 43.15.

[17] Augustine to Proculeianus, 396, epist. 33.1.

Ideally; but what Augustine found was a coterie of entrenched and uncompromising Donatists. They could typically be found among the secessionists' strict separatists who not only refused to debate Caecilianists but also demanded that their congregants have no commerce with members of the rival church. Augustine was increasingly irritated by ingrate separatists who, to his mind, failed to appreciate the collegial spirit animating his offers to talk. Yet he continued to oppose many of his partisans as well, specifically, Caecilianist--or, as he called them, catholic-- Christians who advocated appealing for assistance from the government. In 403, however, he collaborated with Bishop Aurelius of Carthage on a proposal to promote local conferences and enlist the help of magistrates. Presumably, respected seniores would arbitrate neither officially nor aggressively. Instead, they would serve as referees.[18] Augustine remained fearful of formats that could turn conferences into nasty confrontations. He wanted to keep zealots from stirring up crowds, as we noted, and even suggested that crowds, cheering and jeering, were insurmountable obstacles to reconciliation (impedimentum potius quam adjumentum afferentes). He introduced the idea of conferring in small villages where neither faction had established a church. A neutral site seemed ideal for poring over sacred texts and more recent documents, the meaning of which was in dispute, without having to cope with contentious and outspoken spectators.[19] But by 406, writing to Donatist Bishop Januarius, Augustine issued a veiled ultimatum, hinting that Donatist colleagues would soon be faced with the decision either to confer and reconcile with catholic Christian counterparts or to be summoned to confer with government officials bent on their suppression.[20]

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[18] Lamirande, "Origines," 222-24.

[19] See Augustine's letter to Eleusis and others, 398, epist. 44.14.

[20] Augustine to Januarius, 406, epist. 88.10.

The letter to Januarius also mentioned difficulties catholic Christians in Hippo were experiencing with secessionist thugs. Fourth-century complainants called them circumcellions. Augustine depicted them as paramilitary squadrons composed of vagrants, of generally aimless ruffians easily incited by Donatists to intimidate and assault catholic Christians. By the end of the first decade of the fifth century, he was circulating reports of circumcellions' atrocities and calling on government authorities to remove local officials who tolerated the terror. Since the 340s, circumcellions had been associated with disruptive activities, but it was Augustine who insistently associated them with his secessionist rivals and exaggerated their savagery as the Donatists' homicidal "enforcers." He emphasized the damage they did, stealing souls from the Caecilianists or catholics, yet he figured that the barbarous murders circumcellions committed, making them "men of blood" (viri sanguinum)--"armed and active everywhere"--as ruthless as the barbarians who threatened Europe, also made them public enemies and made them excellent reasons to solicit government intervention.[21] Augustine's letter to the Donatist bishop of Hippo suggests that moderate Donatists had been considered something of a counter-force. But by 409, dissidents' prelates were in a tight spot. How could they appear "severe" when so many of them owed their basilicas to the circumcellions who frightened away the catholics and left their rivals in possession? Augustine concluded that catholic Christians were unrealistic to expect a remedy to materialize among the secessionists. The Donatists were the driving force (agonistices) of the circumcellions who were "arming themselves against the law." Hence the catholics legitimately

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[21] Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos 54. 26: "[N]on quiescent armati ubique Circumcelliones." Also consult Cécile Barreteau-Revel, "Faire l'unité dans l'Église d'Afrique du Nord: la réintégration des donatistes des IVᵉ et Vᵉ siècles," Les Pères de l'Église et les dissidents: Dissidence, exclusion et réintégration dans les communautés chrétiennes des six premiers siècles, ed. Pascal-Grégoire Delage (La Rochelle: Caritas Patrum, 2010), 236-37; Peter Iver Kaufman, "Donatism Revisited: Moderates and Militants in Late Antique North Africa," Journal of Late Antiquity 2 (2009), 131-42 and Brent D. Shaw, Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), especially 634-37, 646-47, 656-59, and 702-704.

invited the law to proceed against circumcellions. And Augustine's invitation raised the stakes, doubting the Donatists' moderates' determination to end the violence, overstating the militants' malevolence, and overdramatizing Africa's immanent fall into anarchy.[22]

But Augustine's invitation was "fundamentally defensive," as Charles Matthewes says, stipulating that it was in no way "an exemplary case of Constantinianism."[23] I agree and have emphasized what impelled Augustine to appeal for government assistance. In what remains of this paper, I want to trawl in several of Augustine's texts to catch a modus operandi, which can be construed as an alternative to Constantinian Christianity.

As he recalled in his Confessions, he was not looking for alternatives earlier in his career. He wanted a place at Court. His plan in Milan was to cultivate influential friends, flatter officials, and make an advantageous marriage. His associations, although professionally promising, were personally unfulfilling. He grew apprehensive. He came to believe that the happiness he sought was specious, that beggars were better off, and that his hunt for patronage had turned him into a beggar.[24] Years later, composing his memoir, he noted that he and several friends contemplated forming a community of scholars "far removed from crowds." A bursar or two would have been appointed, so that, others, undistracted, could devote themselves to studies or conversations, yet several wives were unwilling to consent. The project was abandoned.[25] Its appeal for Augustine, who was unwed, is comprehensible. He had been drawn to the Manichees years before, in part,

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[22] See Augustine's letter to Macrobius, 409, epist. 108.6, 18-19.

[23] Matthewes, Republic of Grace, 49-51.

[24] Conf 6.6, 9 and 6.11, 18-19. Also see spec saec lepelley in inc pol.

[25] Conf 6.14.24.

because he valued the companionship and conversation in the sect's cells. He was attracted as well by promises that Manichaean specialists could explain cosmology and Christian theology. Even after he became disillusioned with their "utterly confused" explanations and unbecoming conduct, which they egregiously excused by referring to allegedly righteous sinners featured in Christianity's sacred texts, Augustine was loath to leave the Manichees.[26] Historian Peter Brown is persuaded that "decades of shared religious intensity, first as a Manichee" and "as a pioneer of a philosophical commune" led Augustine to withdraw to a country estate outside Milan for a few months with his mother, his son, and some others--"a community of like-minded souls," Brown says--and then led him to return to North Africa, with his "party of retired bureaucrats and failed would-be courtiers" to constitute "a closed religious group," a company of Christian intellectuals intent on prayer, reading, and discussion.[27]

While composing his Confessions, Augustine came to the conclusion that "closed religious groups" could not hope to possess God's truth. He explained, borrowing from the psalms, that his faith's "new song" could not be sung ad partem, in one region or by one sect. Augustine argued as much in reply to Donatists who, as he construed their case, defended the contrary.[28] But that was after he returned to Africa and promoted the universality of Christianity. In Italy he was satisfied that companies of Christians in Cassiciacum and Ostia could encourage self-inquiry as well as colloquy (interius cogitando et loquendo), which he thought necessary as preparation for his party's approach to "the edge of eternity."[29] Studies of his Confessions have

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[26] De utilitate [3] 14.31 and 18.36; de moribus [1], 19.72. also coyle, pp. 244-48 and now Beduhn full ref.
[27] Brown, thru the eye-- 166-67.

[28] En. Ps. 66.6. and other places

[29] Conf 9.10, 24.

underscored introspection. Gaetano Piccolo's new study of Augustine's epistemology discusses

interiority at length, suggesting that the privacy privileged in the text bespeaks an isolation that

ought not to be overvalued. Interiority, especially memory, is central to the reception of God's

revelation about oneself, yet one's inner life, overemphasized, becomes "the principal obstacle

to" <u>convivenza</u> <u>civile</u>.[30] But Augustine added discourse (<u>loquendo</u>) to personal reflection when

describing his party's pastime. He seems to have been signaling that he attributed its success to

discourse as well as to sighs, studies, and prayers. He elsewhere--and increasingly, as he came

under the influence of the gospels' and of the apostle Paul's calls for self-reform--advised that

colloquy, "a surface activity," was preliminary to contemplation. Nonetheless, as Phillip Cary

notices, "the privacy of the inner self is a temporary phenomenon" as well. Augustine came to

look forward to the time (and perhaps, during colloquies at Cassiciacum, Ostia, and Thagaste,

enjoyed a preview of that time) when the "inmost selves" of the faithful will "be open to each

other's gaze, as they were always meant to be."[31]

Memory was critical: <u>ego</u> <u>sum</u> <u>qui</u> <u>memini</u>.[32] Their memories constituted Christians.

Memory probed and processed experiences, and--in Augustine's experience, reported in his

<u>Confessions</u>--molded experience into what Brian Stock calls "the West's first fully developed

narrative philosophy."[33] The tenth and eleventh books of the <u>Confessions</u> are its display cases.

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[30] Gaetano Piccolo, <u>I processi di apperendimento in Agostino d'Ippona</u> (Rome: Aracne, 2009), 228-34.

[31] Phillip Cary, <u>Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 121-22. Also see Brian Stock, "Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and Some Later Authors," <u>The Journal of Religion</u> 91 (2011), 11-12 and Stock's <u>Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 190-91.

[32] Conf 10.16, 25.

[33] Stock, Augustine's Inner Dialogue, 181-82, 213-214. Also see Paula Fredriksen, <u>Sin: The Early History of an Idea</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 118-19, for Augustine on time, language, and "the integrative functioning of memory."

Significantly, the latter starts speaking "plurally and communally," as Charles Mathewes says; readers follow Augustine measuring time, but "now we are in the church."[34]

Faithful Christians in the church were on pilgrimage in time, Augustine explained later, when he realized that Constantinian Christianity was, in theory and practice, unsturdy. After he wrote the Confessions--but before his times seemed so out of joint following the crises the sack of Rome in 410--he associated pilgrimage with tears. Weeping was an appropriate response to the faithful's estrangement from the celestial city.[35] Despite the consolations on offer in time--rationality, vitality, creativity, and the church with its sacraments--pilgrims required reminding that their true home was elsewhere, and that their purpose was, in large part, to long for it. The church was also the repository for the memories (and interpretations of same) that reinforced a sense of the Christians' mission to proclaim their citizenship in the celestial city as well as their longing for it. Augustine learned as much in the 380s. He recalled in his Confessions a story he heard from Simplicianus, who later succeeded Ambrose as bishop of Milan, but who was then coaxing his interlocutor towards the church. The story's protagonist, Victorinus, was a widely respected rhetorician, as was Augustine. Victorinus found truth and comfort in Christianity but resisted coming to church despite Simplicianus's nagging and until God moved him to make a public, conspicuous, and celebrated confession of his adopted faith and to join "God's gentle flock."[36]

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[34] Mathewes, "The Liberation of Questioning in Augustine's Confessions," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 70 (2002), 554.

[35] Sermon 31, 5.

[36] Conf. 8.2, 5.

The church was custodian of memories and stories such as Simplicianus's. Retelling the stories of conversions instructed prospective converts. Conceivably, Augustine was thinking of that possibility when he drafted his Confessions and added his odyssey to the church's memory bank. A number of Rome's celebrated poets and historians had faced up to a related challenge, composing stories to create memories and inspire solidarity and civic values. Patrice Cambronne suggests that Augustine likely conceived of them as "demi-valeurs."[37] His City of God seems to deploy the church's memories and stories, especially those of Christianity's martyrs, to put civic virtues in perspective. Rehearsing the martyrs' ordeals also suggested to Christian pilgrims what they could expect from authorities, even after the Constantinian settlement of religious affairs. For pagans commonly blamed Christians for the empire's setbacks, particularly after parts of Rome were reduced to rubble in 410--blamed for having abandoned Rome's old gods who had protected the cities whose leading citizens worshipped them.[38] Remembering martyrs, Christian pilgrims came to realize that their life in this world was "a life of captivity" and that they should stand ready to embrace the promise of redemption, as did their martyrs, rather than cultivating civic pride and accumulating and cherishing possessions associated secular life.[39] The pagans' poets and historians sacralized the secular with "delusional, disgraceful" recollections of their deities' frivolous and often reprehensible behavior. As Patrice Cambronne claims, Augustine appreciated that the pagans were creating memories as "cement," binding citizens to cities or governments. Their purposes were understandable, and one can infer from what he wrote to

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[37] See Patrice Cambronne, Saint Augustin: Un voyage au coeur du temps, 2 vols. (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2010 - 2011), 1, 139.

[38] De Civ 1.29.

[39] De Civ. 19.17: apud terrenam civitatem velut captivam vivam.

Nectarius in the early fifth century that Augustine did not think civic piety, in moderation, objectionable. But the pagans' storytellers were charlatans. He relayed his memory of the martyrs to bind pilgrims to their church and its promise of redemption.[40]

Binding pilgrims to each other as well as to the repository of their faith's stories and memories, Augustine, in effect, steps outside our frame of reference, which, as Martin Claussen says, takes pilgrimage "as a somewhat solitary exercise." "For Augustine, it is not." Indeed, "it is something the whole community . . . does together."[41] Entering the community, catechumens are given history lessons. They start with the Old Testament's saga of creation, fall, and flood. They annotate the apostles' ordeals and conclude with a short tribute to the martyrs, who attested the truth of their faith until "the neck" of their persecutors' pride had been snapped (fracta superbia cervice).[42] The church, as Joost van Neer notices, makes memories come alive "to build up the faith" (opbouw van het geloof). On Augustine's watch, memories make the church's history so much more appealing than that of the secular world.[43]

Historians note the few places in Augustine's City that seem to refer favorably to Rome's achievements. Contestable translations and interpretations of those and other passages suggest he believed it possible for secular regimes to be more or less just. Some rather acrobatic readings of the City's fourth book blame the extension of the empire on the unruly conduct of neighbors that it absorbed. The lust for domination afflicting all politically ambitious players, which Augustine

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[40] See ep. 91, 4-6; De civ. 5, 16-21; and Cambronne, Voyage au coeur du temps, 1, 90-96.

[41] M. A. Claussen, "Peregrinatio and Peregrini in Augustine's City of God," Traditio 46 (91): 43-44.

[42] De cathech 24, 44.

[43] Joos van Neer, "Bouwen aan het geloof: De twee modeltoespraken in De Catechizandis rudibus," Lampas 43 (2010), 356.

deplores, is all but ignored, although, according to the City, it should make political equilibrium impossible. That the City defines a republic without reference to justice and that it endorses the complaint of one of Cicero's characters in De re publica who complained that political practice requires unjust behavior looked irrelevant to those scholars devoted to discovering Augustine's optimism--or sources for optimism in his City--about the secular.[44] Thomas Martin's essay on "the politics of monasticism" seems to me to rest on safer ground associating Augustine's take on fairness and meaningful reciprocity with "the republic of grace" in convents. Monasticism was peregrinans and "far from perfect," yet it represented humanity's best bet, in hoc saeculo maligno, to get just results. "The monastic community does witness to the art of the possible, what can be done while still on pilgrimage."[45] For magistrates and soldiers who cannot responsibly retire from the secular world, their duties amount to damage control. Augustine advises them to pray for deliverance, fret about the inconsistency between their political practice and piety, and repent. In the church, ideally, they will find greater scope for the uncompromising exercise of virtue.[46]

A few lines of wishful thinking in Augustine's correspondence intimate that his faith's precepts might overhaul and "consecrate" the secular order. No remedies for corruption and no program for the improvement of Constantinian Christianity or of the government develop from

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[44] Start with Cornish's exegesis of de civ 4.4 and 4.15, pp. 139-40. For Cicero and injustice in the City, de civ 2.21. Go to my inc pol and dystop for other ref-s and my rejoinders.

[45] Thomas Martin, "Augustine and the Politics of Monasticism," Augustine and Politics, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Pfaffenroth (New York: Lexington, 2005), 183-84.

[46] Ep. 220 and De Civ 19.6.

them. The world is to be used--but will not be ascertainably improved--by Christians and their church.[47]

The church, on pilgrimage, is the context in which operative and cooperative grace improves relations among the faithful and the relations between them and their creator and redeemer. Christians are taught to expect celestial rewards, properly to assess temporal rewards, and to pay forward God's love in their love for their neighbors--but not to propose new religious foundations for civic solidarity or municipal moral order. Augustine did not politicize piety. For him, religious piety's proper arena was, as John Rist now suggests, "unpolitical."[48] It would not be irrelevant to Augustine's calculations on the distance between Christianity and Constantinian politics to recall what Francesco D'Agostino identifies as his antigiuridismo and how virulently he rejected the Pelagians' efforts to depict law as grace, when they insisted that freedom to obey the law was implicit in the very existence of law. Pelagius anticipated that the faithful would put in practice the laws of God and could see that they were reflected in the laws of civil society. To Augustine, such confidence was ill-founded.[49]

But perhaps he was what Christoph Horn calls "a political functionalist." Horn's functionalist, in this context, acknowledges "the normativity" of institutions and laws, accepting that prevalent political practices serve useful, although occasionally amoral or immoral purposes. But surely Augustine would have stipulated that institutions, laws, and practices in the terrestrial city were normative--if at all--to a point, for distress "everywhere filled" what he knew of human

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[47] Ep. 138, 10. And possibly my inc pol chapter or parts thereof.

[48] Rist, see my calama art n. 51, p. 35 cf some of the dodaro there and dod's book.

[49] Francesco D'Agostino, "L'antigiuridismo di S. Agostino," Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto 64 (1987), 31, 35-36, 40-41.

experience (<u>ubique</u> <u>impleverunt</u>) "in this wicked world." Seditions and suspicions afflicted what

passed as ordinary lives. Augustine coupled sin with secularity to such an extent that "moralism"

all but purged whatever there was of his functionalism.[50] In his <u>City of God</u> his sense that

political behavior and, more important, political institutions invariably succumb to "the universal

sway of antagonism" is infectious. The phrase is John Milbank's, whose characterization is quite

controversial, although, as one dissenter--James Wetzel--concedes that Milbank "is not without

an exegetical basis in the <u>City of God</u> for conjoining sin, secularity, and paganism."[51]

Christians' compassion is better spent in churches, paying forward God's love for the

celestial city in their love for neighbors. <u>Opera</u> <u>misericordiae</u> there were sacrifices that assuredly

(<u>profecto</u>) pleased God, Augustine warranted, and, he said elsewhere, might even snatch (<u>rapere</u>)

neighbors whose conduct had been objectionable and turn them into effective executors of God's

love.[52] To reform others required that one be reformed, which, for Augustine, meant having the

form of worldly desire (<u>formam</u> <u>concupiscentiae</u> <u>saecularis</u> <u>amittat</u>) "consumed" by "the fire of

God's love." That "fire" was kindled by submission to God. Pilgrims' passions for the celestial

city began with self-inquiry, which Luigi Alici calls "spiritual reconnaissance," developed with

their submission, and contributed to constituting churches as pride-free zones in which aversion

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[50] De Civ 19. 5. Christoph Horn, "Augustinus über politische Ethik und legitime Staatsgewalt," in <u>Augustinus: Recht und Gewalt</u>, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2010), 65-67 proposes this reading of Augustine's "functionalism" without endorsing it.

[51] See John Milbank, <u>Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason</u> (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 389 and James Wetzel, "Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues: Variations on Milbank's Augustine," <u>The Journal of Religious Ethics</u> 32 (2004), 280-81.

[52] Sermon 90A, 11 and De Civ 20.24, 2.

to contention eventually--and ideally--would douse the self-love and lusts that inflame

contentious spirits.[53]

"Zoning" the church in this manner returns us to Augustine's opposition to the Donatists.
To his mind, Donatists' claims to superior righteousness--their purported libels against their first
critics, the Caecilianists, and their resistance to reconciliation--exhibited a lack of compassion
and addictions to contention. Augustine thought the Pelagians were similarly afflicted, and he
chided them as well for conceit. Their claims to please God without special divine assistance
"carried them," he said, "from the certainties [of faith] to idolatry."[54] Historian J. Patout Burns
adroitly sums up Augustine's position on pride, which "played itself out in claims to moral self-
sufficiency, to religious superiority, and to political domination. Consequently, if the power of
evil is to be overcome, pride is the principal obstacle to overcome." One function of the law is
"to dissolve a person's sense of self-reliance," Patout Burns continues, but it is also the function
of the church to challenge members' complacence and self-satisfaction--to contribute to the
process by which the celestial city "is constantly being formed by the reform (mutatione) of the
wicked."[55] Augustine admitted that there was heavy lifting ahead with professed Christians in the
church. "Many live lives unworthy of the baptisms they received." They crowd into the circus
rather than into the basilica. They set up shops on holy days or complain when and if shopping
then is restricted.[56] Augustine urged the faithful to help their less scrupulous colleagues to "cross
the Red Sea" and get just wet enough to wash away the residue of their sinful lives and accept

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[53] De Civ 10.6; Alici, pp. 87-90 (my ref 1994 artcl).

[54] De spiritu
[55] En Ps 61.7; Patout burns, p. 24.

[56] En. Ps. 80, 2.

God's promises and put the temptations of this wicked world into perspective.[57] In the same sermon, preached sometime during the first decade of the fifth century or soon after Rome's humiliation in 410, he concluded that Christians might be of service to their tempters, to dregs (amurca) who would draw them into the saeculum and to participate as incurious, uncomplaining citizens of this wicked world. Perhaps the faithful should bring that slag to church and change it into precious metal.[58]

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[57] En. Ps. 80, 8.

[58] En, Ps. 80, 11.