

2-2003

Patience and/or Politics: Augustine and the Crisis at Calama, 408-409

Peter Iver Kaufman

University of Richmond, pkaufman@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/jepson-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kaufman, Peter Iver. "Patience and/or Politics: Augustine and the Crisis at Calama, 408-409." *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 1 (Feb., 2003): 22-35.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jepson School of Leadership Studies articles, book chapters and other publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

**PATIENCE AND/OR POLITICS:
AUGUSTINE AND THE CRISIS AT CALAMA, 408-409**

BY

PETER IVER KAUFMAN

Few scholars would quarrel with Ernst Dassmann's observation that early Christian "reserve" toward the political cultures of antiquity—a mixture of deference and indifference, which only occasionally gave way to hostility—turned Christians' outcast status into something of a virtue.¹ Still fewer are likely to dispute the assertion that influential fourth-century Christians unreservedly welcomed the changes that came with Constantine and anticipated the "Christianization" of imperial, if not also local, politics.² But evaluations of Augustine's enthusiasm later that century and early the next never fail now to elicit disagreement. From the time he left his political ambitions in Milan and returned to Africa as a *servus Dei* until the news of Alaric's sack of Rome reached him, how optimistically did he contemplate contributions Christianity might make to improve municipal and imperial government?³

Robert Markus and Goulven Madec answer that question suggestively, but differently, by asking and answering others: what did Augustine mean when he referred to "Christian times"; did he apply the term routinely, rarely, euphorically or perhaps sceptically to the period in which Theodosius

¹ Dassmann, "*Fuga Saeculi*: Aspekte frühchristlicher Kulturkritik bei Ambrosius und Augustinus", in *Wege der Theologie: An der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend* (Paderborn, 1996), 941.

² See, for example, the discussion of Eusebius in Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics* (Princeton, 1990), 14-28.

³ For the parameters, see Claude Lepelley, "*Spes Saeculi*: Le milieu sociale d'Augustin et ses ambitions seculières avant sa conversion," *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 24-26 (1987), 99-117; Claude Lepelley, "Un aspect de la conversion d'Augustin: La rupture avec ses ambitions sociales et politiques", *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 88 (1987), 229-46; and Jean-Claude Fredouille, "Les sermons d'Augustin sur la chute de Rome", in *Augustin Prédicateur*, ed. Goulven Madec (Paris, 1998), 339-48.

and Honorius ruled? I shall ask a slightly different question here to reformulate the issue of optimism and inquire about Augustine's responses to the crisis at Calama in 408, responses, I argue, that document what Carol Harrison now calls "the fact that Christianity provided no real alternative to the traditional link[s] between paganism and civic duty and patriotism". We want to discover whether Augustine negotiated any relationship between Christian piety and municipal politics that might usefully have replaced the supportive roles played by pagan philosophy and religion by encouraging social reconciliation, civic virtue, and city solidarity.⁴

Was Christianity good for government? Augustine insisted it was not as bad as pagans claimed after Alaric had humiliated the western empire. The first few books of his *City of God* addressed their general accusations that blamed Christians for Rome's embarrassment. And replying to specific criticisms, Augustine assured that the faithful would not shrink from defending their cities simply because their savior suggested that assailants be accommodated (Matthew 5:39-41). Nor did Christians flinch from punishing criminals, despite the apostle's instructions not to return evil for evil (Romans 12:17).⁵ Augustine justified such punishment several years before. He twice refused to intercede, as requested, and answer appeals for an amnesty for pagans who had destroyed the church at Calama, just south of his diocese, thirty miles to the southwest of Hippo. Were perpetrators and their patrons to go unpunished, others elsewhere, he guessed, might be more easily incited to similar violence.⁶ At Calama, rioters had been provoked by local Christians' request that city officials enforce imperial prohibitions of pagan pageantry. Days of rage followed, leaving the church in ashes and the bishop in hiding. Another Christian was killed in the scuffles. Augustine traveled to the scene to survey the damage. He agreed

⁴ Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford, 2000), 134-35. Consult the latest status report on the question of Augustine's "Christian times", Robert Markus, "Tempora Christiana Revisited", in *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (Cambridge, 2000), 201-13; also consider Markus' first sighting of "euphoria", *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1988), 29-32, 51-52 and Madec's dissent in "Tempora Christiana: Expressions du triomphalisme chrétien ou recrimination paienne?" *Scientia Augustiniana: Studien über Augustinus, den Augustinismus, und den Augustinerorden*, ed. Petrus Meyer and Willigis Eckermann (Wurzburg, 1975), 112-36.

⁵ Eps. 136.2 and 138.14.

⁶ Ep. 104.9 and Hendrik Huisman, *Augustinus' Briefwisseling met Nectarius* (Amsterdam, 1951), 138-39.

to oppose both the use of torture to identify ringleaders and the capital punishment of any offender. The pagans, however, wanted more. They offered to pay compensatory damages, but Possidius, the local bishop, had left for Italy, they figured, to press for punitive damages that would surely beggar them. They chose Nectarius to ask for Augustine's help and explain why they preferred death to destitution (*egestosa vita*).⁷

Augustine's first reply should have dissuaded Nectarius from filing a second appeal. For Augustine made it plain how little he liked receiving requests from pagans disinclined to forward those same requests in prayers to his God.⁸ But Nectarius should also have learned from the first reply that the bishop would unlikely intervene to lighten or lift the assessments. He understood that the penalties might lead to poverty, but he trusted that poverty would lead to correction and piety. If Nectarius truly desired the prosperity and happiness of his clients in Calama, he would have them stop struggling to save their material possessions and learn more about the celestial city on pilgrimage in time.⁹

Nectarius half heard and ostensibly concurred. Sojourners here ought to attend to the hereafter, to their celestial city (or *patria*). And their affection for, and distinguished service to, their terrestrial cities reserved them a place in the beyond. "They live all the more with God", he said, for having lived usefully among their fellow citizens.¹⁰

Augustine disagreed. Nectarius' notion that civil service earned celestial rewards seemed perverse to him. It was not that Christianity disdained civic virtues; quite the contrary, to the extent that it commended probity, honesty, and fidelity, Christianity promoted citizenship in this world as it prepared citizens for the next.¹¹ Yet, Augustine went on, Christianity never inflated the value of virtue. He allowed that Nectarius might well have been sincere about getting to God's kingdom, though he would not get there. Desires to reach the celestial city expressed in devotion to terrestrial

⁷ Compare ep. 90 (*de damnis facilis potest haberi taxatio*) with ep. 103.3 (*gravius est enim male vivere quam mala morte finire*). For the little we know about Nectarius, consult J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1980), 774 and André Mandouze, *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne, 303-533* (Paris, 1982), 776-79.

⁸ Ep. 91.10.

⁹ Ep. 91.1-2.

¹⁰ Ep. 103.2, adapting Cicero. For Nectarius' courtesy (*libenter audiui; gratanter accepi*), Huisman, *Briefwisseling*, 121-22.

¹¹ Ep. 91.3.

cities amounted to a vain, misguided trust in civic piety and human enterprise. One ought to “hold to the path by which [we] may not just seek but also find” the otherworldly peace we covet. That “path”, Augustine specified, was something of a withdrawal and “flight” *ad gratiam*. Neither civic pieties nor political programs pleased God, he concluded; given the distance that must always separate humanity and its social schemes from perfection, we should take refuge in God’s grace. It was the route or refuge that absolved sins, including sins of self-assertion and political pretension, and it was the only route leading to the celestial city.¹²

Civic virtue was insufficient. Pagans could not draw close to the celestial city by being diligent citizens. According to Augustine, the sole route to heaven passed through Christianity; no “true and saving penance” was possible outside the faith.¹³ Nectarius insisted the pagans’ repentance was sincere, a “true” or accurate reflection of their sorrow, but Augustine believed their sorrows were feigned. He suggested Calama’s grief was convenient; the pagans were simulating sorrow to escape punishment. They had no fear of having offended the Christians’ God. They showed no signs of that self-lacerating, self-scourging “satisfaction of repentance” with which Christians atoned for their offenses and signalled their readiness for rehabilitation. A bishop’s job was to get souls ready, to get them to and through the portals of their celestial *patria*, their better city (*meliori civitati*).¹⁴ Were Augustine to allow himself to be swayed by the reports of Calama’s remorse and by the promise of detente, he would, in effect, be purchasing provisional peace in this world at the cost of perpetual peace in the next. For him, it was far better to redeem souls than to relieve citizens. Nectarius petitioned for relief, which had doubtful relevance to redemption. The bishop refused.¹⁵

William Connolly lately took pains to identify the politically authoritarian implications of Augustine’s refusal, setting it in the context of the bishop’s “politics of conversion”. Connolly catches Augustine urging others towards those portals through which he passed years before. He had already recorded his failings and confessions in his autobiography, the lesson of which was that shame, self-renunciation, and extravagant acknowledgment of divine sovereignty—all of which constituted confession—eased

¹² Ep. 104.11-12.

¹³ Ep. 104.9: *veracem ac salubrem paenitentiam*.

¹⁴ Ep. 91.1. Also see Augustine’s sermon 251.7, *per satisfactionem poenitentiae*.

¹⁵ Ep. 91.10.

the passage to celestial peace. Connolly cites that lesson as he analyzes Augustine's "artful concealment of transcendental egoism." He finds that Augustine "generalized" his experience of conversion to create a new orthodoxy which commended a formula for confession by endorsing select concepts of God's sovereignty, human rationality, and the moral order. He "insistently press[ed his] directives on others", Connolly says, illustrating that "pressure" with a short statement clipped from the first reply to Nectarius. He suspects Augustine of shoring up his faith, of "consolidat[ing], stabiliz[ing], and generaliz[ing] his faith through confession and conversion" whenever he lectured heretics and pagans on guilt and penitence. The letters to Calama were no exception.¹⁶

Yet Augustine disavowed any intention of driving pagans to destitution or having poverty drive them to repent and to Christianity. He proposed only that punitive damages be severe enough to deter rogues elsewhere and deprive citizens of Calama of the pleasures of their pagan festivals.¹⁷ Perhaps he hoped that the cults would collapse for lack of funds, but Connolly presumes "transcendental egoism" aspired to more. His egoist Augustine emphasized the inferiority of rival convictions, trying to impose his "experience of intrinsic moral order" on others who were told that they could not "devise a morality" unless they adopted his "fundaments". To Connolly, that was the point of Augustine's "politics of difference" (when he branded different religious commitments as diabolically dangerous), "politics of identity" (when he suppressed competition from coreligionists), and "politics of conversion" at nearly every turn—even if the bishop was utterly unaware of it. Nietzsche helped Connolly detect all this "politicking", insofar as the nineteenth-century theorist proved particularly adept "at bringing out the subterranean fundamentalism of many who otherwise deny it." Connolly's implication is that, had Nectarius read Nietzsche, Calama's advocate would have known he was up against a remarkably resourceful political authoritarianism.¹⁸

¹⁶ William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative: The Politics of Morality* (Newbury Park, California, 1993), 65-66, 76-77, 85-86, and 139-40.

¹⁷ Ep. 104.4-7.

¹⁸ Connolly, *Imperative*, 34-35, 73-74, 111-112, and n. 7, 159, for "subterranean fundamentalism". Connolly professes that his *Imperative* is more about authoritarianism than about Augustine, and, despite the author's subsequent efforts to make the bishop "a carrier" of concepts or a practitioner of various "politics", I am tempted to agree.

Robert Dodaro concurs with Connolly: Augustine spurned the pagans' contrition at Calama because their "confessions would not have been instruments of their conversion". But, whereas Connolly thinks that Augustine "aimed at reinforcing patterns of political control and exclusion", Dodaro explains that emphasis on coercive features of "Augustinian confession" misrepresents the bishop's objectives. "Augustine's intention is clear" to Dodaro; the correspondence with Nectarius suggests Christianity's "capacity to promote social reconciliation" and "the public good", suggesting as well to those intent on "nurtur[ing] civic order and peace" Christianity's superiority to paganism.¹⁹

On Dodaro's watch, Augustine found a way to foster an "aptitude for [social] reconciliation" among those who repeatedly confessed their sins. The plan of this "politics of confession" was simple but strikingly different from what was on offer elsewhere. Philosophical prescriptions for the polis generally assumed that reason and a shared sense of honor among citizens enabled civic-spirited leaders to govern well and without incident. Augustine, though, trusted that regular confession of unreasonable and dishonorable behaviors would prove good for society as well as for the soul. Confession taught forgiveness, and forgiveness—rather than social control and exclusion—assured "the public good". To the philosophical faith in, and hopes for, rationality, autonomy, and civic virtue, Augustine "prefer[red] a quality of mercy that results from self-knowledge deepened through confession of moral and spiritual failure because it produces a compassion for other sinners that arises out of a recollected experience of moral weakness commonly shared".²⁰

On occasion, he wondered whether society might be refashioned by Christians' compassion. He mused to Marcellinus that their religion's cardinal rule against returning evil for evil could end all cruelties associated with political measures and "consecrate" a commonwealth: from "weakness commonly shared" might come strength, solidarity, and peace.²¹ Self-assertion, naturally, remained irrepressible. Confession, therefore, was constantly in season. And Dodaro's Augustine urged confession because it underscored "the soul's complete inability to establish moral autonomy",

¹⁹ Robert Dodaro, "Augustine's Secular City", *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. Dodaro and George Lawless (London, 2000), 235-259.

²⁰ Dodaro, "City", 246.

²¹ Ep. 138.10.

encouraging realistic rather than ridiculous hopes for societies built on weakness. Peace was society's work in progress and, for Augustine, would always be so. Still, Christianity (specifically, the recurrent confession he advised) was "capable of promoting a paradoxically lasting, because necessarily ongoing, social reconciliation".²²

At one point in his first reply to Nectarius, Augustine seems to substantiate Dodaro's interpretation. Acknowledging his correspondent's hope to secure Calama against cycles of violence and vengeance—to have his colony "flourish"—the bishop replied that citizens would "flourish" forever (*intermina aeternitate floreunt*), if only Calama were assimilated into the celestial city. Yet Augustine only rarely coupled Christianity with public prosperity and safety, and his linking social reconciliation and municipal efflorescence with Christian confessions in his answers to Nectarius appears incidental rather than insistent, hypothetical rather than programmatic. He chose not to elaborate, though, if he contemplated the city's conversion, he almost immediately signalled that it was highly improbable, grimly foretelling that God might well have more debilitating penalties in store for the pagans there and might just as well elect to leave them unpunished and unreformed.²³

Perhaps Augustine tried to shock the pagan appellants of Calama. More likely, though, he was simply indicating the implausibility (or impossibility) of converting and assimilating entire colonies and populations. The enduring problem was that citizens' desperate attachments to their possessions made them forgetful of their celestial *patria*. Nectarius referred to that heavenly homeland as if it were within easy reach. But, ironically, his second appeal demonstrated the contrary to Augustine, for it asked that the pagans be permitted to keep their possessions. The petition, therefore, documented the chasm that had opened between Calama materialism and Christian altruism. True, the pagans accepted responsibility for the destruction of the church. Yet their unwillingness to part with their possessions—beyond those required to compensate the Christians—told against them. Augustine remembered citizens of the republic, seven centuries before, who were satisfied with less accumulated property than Nectarius' clients wanted to retain. The damages assessed against Calama's pagans, he calculated, left them with far more than what their worthy ancestors judged to be

²² Dodaro, "City", 250-51.

²³ Eps. 91.6 and 138.15.

excessive when they expelled Publius Cornelius Rufinus from the Roman senate for assets that offended. And when Rufinus resurfaced in Augustine's subsequent remarks on affluence, the bishop grew angrier at that long-dead consul's private fortune and still kinder to his accusers. They were right to disgrace Rufinus, to enforce sumptuary legislation, and to favor public spending to private wealth. They reminded the bishop of the earliest Christians who pooled their resources to care for the neediest.²⁴ Nectarius and his clients should fear property more than poverty, Augustine said; they ought to stop remonstrating for pardons and their possessions. It was luxury that impoverished, he continued, inasmuch as ease and opulence deprived the rich of the riches to be experienced with the love of God. Augustine put it bluntly in another context: a love for God and love for gain were antithetical.²⁵

But unpropertied and unpretentious pagans, Augustine supposed, came no closer to their celestial *patria*. Literature mentioned that the gods they admired behaved scandalously, yet they saw nothing improper about imitating them. They preferred lusty Jupiter to the public-spirited heroes Nectarius lionized, Cato, Scipio, and Cicero. So, notwithstanding Nectarius' faith, that is, his trust in his clients' civic virtue, Augustine had grave doubts. He questioned their capacity for citizenship. No wonder, then, that he appeared to have given up on Calama.²⁶ Dodaro, however, believes Augustine was actually offering a new and Christian foundation for municipal order based on "a shared understanding of the nature of reconciliation among individuals who accept that the spiritual arts of penance—self-examination, confessions, prayer for pardon, and forgiveness of others, especially of enemies—constitute the essence of civic virtue, of *pietas*, and thus the heart of patriotism".²⁷

Yet Augustine's interest in "the essence of civic virtue" and in "the heart of patriotism" may be overstated. His second letter to Calama, describing "the fruit" of genuine repentance, concentrated exclusively on the personal rather than municipal consequences. Nectarius all but invited him

²⁴ Ep. 104.6 and *Civ. Dei* 5.18.

²⁵ *Tract. in Joannis evangelium* 40.10 (*non amat multum nummum, qui amat Deum*) and ep. 104.4.

²⁶ Ep. 103.2.

²⁷ Dodaro, "City", 250. For Augustine's criticisms, ep. 91.4-5 (*Ita clarissimorum virorum in re publica excellentium et de republica disputantium auctoritate firmatur nequissimos homines fieri deorum imitatione peiores non sane verorum sed falsorum atque fictorum*). Also see *Civ. Dei* 2.8.

to do otherwise. He told Augustine of his own dedication to public service, but the bishop counselled him to attend more to the souls of his fellow citizens than to their society.²⁸

But Nectarius was under the impression that bishops intervened both to request God's mercy for souls and to demand fairness and justice from the societies of this world. Augustine did not deny it. He embraced that role when reprehensible Christians were in the dock. But, as for the punishing and pardoning of the pagans of Calama, he was content to defer to God's will and to recommend that Nectarius, who had run out of alternatives, do likewise.²⁹

Years later, when Augustine himself appealed to have other offenders pardoned, the issue of society's security still seemed superfluous to him. It was raised by Macedonius, Vicar of Africa, on receiving the bishop's petition. The vicar said benefactors were to blame when the convicted and condemned, on release, again became menaces to society. Augustine admitted that recidivism was a grave problem. Reprieving one might inadvertently doom innocent others (*unus morti ereptus, plurimos necet*).³⁰ Pardoning perpetrators might embolden would-be imitators. Yet the bishop tactfully protested Macedonius' suggestion that benefactors were responsible for the unintended, regrettable consequences of their interventions. Their intentions were blameless: to have criminals amend their lives and, ideally, to exhibit compassion that should draw onlookers to the church and penitence. Even if that failed to occur, and if their beneficiaries squandered (and worse) the time and opportunity purchased for them to repent, petitions on their behalf nonetheless fulfilled "the obligation of Christian love".³¹ Augustine urged Macedonius to join with bishops and benefactors, to become a co-executor of God's patience. Surely, here was a chance to introduce pragmatic and patriotic arguments for amnesty and reconciliation that would have found favor among public officials, yet Augustine left them to the imagination. Instead, he reminded the vicar of his need for God's mercy and patience: if magistrates expected to be beneficiaries of same, they ought to practice patience when their bishops asked.³²

²⁸ Eps. 103.4 and 104.9-10.

²⁹ Eps. 90 and 104.11.

³⁰ Ep. 153.18.

³¹ Ep. 153.18-19.

³² Ep. 153.8.

There were limits to patience and times when clemency seemed inappropriate. In an imperfect world the likelihood of swift and severe punishment deterred crime. Pagans unafraid of Augustine's God learned to fear government. Nectarius pressed for pardons, probably not thinking they would encourage a sense of security and confidence far more harmful to beneficiaries than anxiety, penalty, and poverty. Augustine was certain that vastly greater, longer-lasting punishments than those handed down by magistrates in this world awaited offenders who got off lightly and returned to their disagreeable ways.³³ Yet he advised patience. Those who loved God above all would remain a minority on this side of the grave, he said, and their pilgrim "city" was commingled here with the terrestrial "city" that venerated false gods and chased after lesser goods. Coexistence required patience.³⁴

And patience was required within the Christian communities as well. The impenitent were known on occasion to come to communion. The apostle Paul warned that they "ate and drank judgment upon" themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-29), but they would not be denied. Augustine admitted that they profaned the sacrament, yet he suggested that fellow bishops be patient and leave punishment to God. He made the same point about the Donatist Christians who appeared to him to prefer purity to peace. He exaggerated their intolerance, that is, their determination to rid their ministry and churches of sinners, to sift straw from wheat. His alternative to Donatist perfectionism was patience. To put up with and correct weaker and admittedly worrisome Christians was "an obligation of Christian love", he explained, accusing the Donatists of having preempted divine judgment. He complained that their impatience and impiety were disrupting the peace of the entire African community.³⁵

Donatists' century-long secession amounted to a spectacular offense against "Christian love" by the time Augustine argued in 411 that their quarrels with other Christians also violated the apostle's instructions to keep such controversy under wraps. To that end—and to others—Augustine encour-

³³ Ep. 104.9: *Sed arbitramur nos etiam pro ipsis aliquid providere, si homines, qui deum non timent, aliquid timeant, quo non eorum laedatur utilitas, sed vanitas castigetur, ne ab eis deus ipse quem spernunt, noxia securitate audacioribus factis gravius offendatur et ne aliis ad imitandum eadem ipsa securitas multo perniciosius proponatur.*

³⁴ *Civ. dei* 18.54.

³⁵ See A.-M. Bonnardière, "Penitence et réconciliation des pénitents d'après saint Augustin", *Revue des études augustiniennes* 13 (1967), 277-78 and sources cited there.

aged parishioners to bring their quarrels to church courts. There, if anywhere, one would expect him to have directed litigants to practice patience, “recollect [their] experience of moral weakness commonly shared”, as Dodaro says, forget reparations, and seek reconciliation.³⁶

But we are uncertain what occurred. We cannot tell whether bishops resolved everyday squabbles in their courts (or, as they were called, “audiences”) and whether, or how, the more important disputes were settled.³⁷ Starved for evidence, historians now welcome remarks relevant to episcopal arbitration in Augustine’s twenty nine newly discovered letters. Claude Lepelley and Kauko Raikas think they have found traces of his enthusiasm for judicial responsibilities. One letter inquired at length about the laws governing slaves’ status, as if Augustine wanted to assure that a decision pending in his court complied with code.³⁸ But, more revealing, what appears to be an unguarded remark in another of Augustine’s letters confides his frustration and confesses his inability to assure restitution, protect the innocent, and—might one assume—promote reconciliation.³⁹ Moreover, he mentioned to Macedonius that powerful secular courts were likewise limited on that third count. They enabled magistrates to assess and enforce reparations and to keep the city streets safe, but the spiritual well-being and happiness of their citizens had nothing whatsoever to do with official rebukes, penalties, and pardons. Christians, be they magistrates or citizens of no special standing, ought to comprehend the limits of human justice and the amplitude of God’s mercy. They must realize the greatest happiness here is to hope for happiness hereafter.⁴⁰

So Christians understandably would be troubled by what their magistrates ordinarily had to do to assemble reliable information and to keep their cities’ streets safe. Augustine opposed torture at Calama, knowing

³⁶ John Lamoreaux, “Episcopal Courts in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), 146-149. Augustine gave only glimpses of court business and nothing to conform to said expectations. See his *De opere monachorum* 29.37; sermon 24.3; ep. 33.5; ep. 48.1; and *Enarrationes in psalmos* 80.21 and 118.24, both citing 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

³⁷ Maria Rose Cimma, *L’Episcopalis Audientia nelle costituzioni imperiali da Costantino a Giustiniano* (Turin, 1989), 121.

³⁸ Ep. 24*; Kauko Raikas, “*Audientia Episcopalis*: Problematik zwischen Staat und Kirche bei Augustin”, *Augustinianum* 37 (1997), 476-77; Claude Lepelley, “Liberté, colonat et esclavage d’après la lettre 24*”, *Les lettres de saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak*, ed. Lepelley (Paris, 1983), 340-42.

³⁹ Ep. 22*.3.

⁴⁰ Ep. 155.6-8, 16.

Christian officials, enforcing the laws, were obliged to torture material witnesses as well as the accused. As officials, they must resign themselves to their duties, he said, but, as Christians, they should pray for deliverance from those necessities.⁴¹ He did not insist that Christians leave public office. God gave justices their powers; executioners and torturers, the instruments of their trades (*ungulae*). They punished offenders and usefully intimidated or restrained the unrighteous. Augustine appreciated the work, admitting to Macedonius that the church's petitions for pardons would be less effective spurs to gratitude and then penitence, were magistrates less diligent in punishing offenders. The bishop made it clear that pardons should not replace official retribution and that, coaxing magistrates to pray for deliverance, he did not intend to chase Christians from public administration. He understood—and he would have had them understand—the need both to punish and to pardon. He appears to have equated the deliverance he commended with magistrates having “principles of patience” in their hearts while the suppression or deterrence of wickedness stayed simultaneously very much on their minds.⁴²

Augustine recycled the then familiar comparison between piracy and the politics of empire to suggest that government, *remota justitia*, was no better than an agreement among thieves. “With justice removed”, regimes behaved badly, demonstrating how formidably the desires for gain and glory opposed the very civic virtues Nectarius thought insuperable.⁴³ That Augustine thought the opposition pervasive and the extinction of political virtue all but certain becomes evident when, later in his *City of God*, in effect, he “removed” justice. He reserved the terms “commonwealth” and “true justice” for the celestial city dispersed on earth, its citizens known to each other only imperfectly.⁴⁴

But it has become fashionable to doubt the significance of Augustine's “removal” or “reserve”. The enthusiasm that greeted the publication of Garry Wills' slender, elegant biography suggests widespread endorsement of his view that “the picture of a man pessimistic about politics” was

⁴¹ *Civ. Dei* 6.19; ep. 104.17.

⁴² Ep. 138.14; ep. 153.16; and *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.9.

⁴³ *Civ. dei* 4.4.

⁴⁴ *Civ. dei* 19.21. Also see R.W. Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of Saint Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001), 47-56 and 181; Oliver O'Donovan, “Augustine's *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought”, *Dionysius* 11 (1987), 106-107; and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, 1990), 406-407.

painted by Augustine's enemies.⁴⁵ Robert Dodaro's interpretation of the Nectarius correspondence and of Augustine's "politics of confession" is more involved and judicious than Wills's, to be sure, but its claim to repossess the bishop's interest in "lasting" and "ongoing" social reconciliation can only brace current thinking about his political optimism. A last look at Augustine's replies seems in order.

His first reply to Nectarius inventories a bishop's burdens. Bishops were to intercede and appeal for mercy when their clients were genuinely remorseful. And we now know that Augustine thought only Christians capable of genuine (soterially effective) remorse and repentance. Still, he opposed capital punishment more broadly and tried to see to it that no one was punished too severely (*ut severiore censura nemo plectatur*). Finally, the reply agreed with Nectarius that church authorities ought to use their influence to promote security and safety, though Augustine presumed that *securitas* meant something different from what his correspondent imagined. Nectarius was much given to mending things. The pagans, he promised, would repair what they destroyed. And, if the punitive damages were waived (*tantum supplicia deprecamur*), he predicted that resentments would dissipate and Calama could come together again. Augustine's response might then have introduced an alternative plan, a mending of sorts based on conversions and confessions that cultivated aptitudes for reconciliation. Instead, he proposed that security born of the kind of forgiveness Nectarius wanted would inevitably be taken as license to do further injury. Augustine proposed another kind of security, founded on faith in God's sovereignty, sustained by living well, and accompanied by contempt for the settled state and safety of terrestrial municipalities much touted by antiquity's political philosophers and its civic-spirited citizens like Nectarius.⁴⁶

The first reply begins and ends with efforts to distinguish one's sense of wellbeing in society from the security of souls on pilgrimage in time. "We risk danger" on earth (*perichitamur*), Augustine reminded Nectarius, to attract fellow citizens in its cities to the portals of a "better", celestial city.⁴⁷ And the bishop concluded by reiterating his interest in saving souls. He said nothing of reforming societies. "We want to harvest souls", he declared without mentioning expectations that a crop or cult following would expand

⁴⁵ Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine* (New York, 1999), 128-129.

⁴⁶ Ep. 91.7: *et salutem hominibus cupimus impertire quae posita est in recte vivendi felicitate non in male faciendi securitate*. For security and contempt, *Civ. dei* 22.6; for Nectarius' proposals, eps. 90 and 103.4.

⁴⁷ Ep. 91.1: *quanto meliori civitati officia debita praerogares*.

to fill entire cities. He specified that the harvesting would be risky and seemed to be as contemptuous as he had been at the start, and as contemptuous as he would remain, of the *securitas* so dear to Nectarius.⁴⁸

The second reply to Nectarius, according to Dodaro, “debat[ed] with [him] over the best ways to care for the city”.⁴⁹ Yet Augustine opposed the prevailing philosophical opinions without presenting theological alternatives. He questioned the value of civic virtue and flatly denied that “care for the city” and civil service reaped celestial rewards. What Ernest Fortin says of Augustine’s sprawling *City of God* applies equally well to his correspondence on the crisis at Calama, for it, too, “cast[s] in the sharpest possible light the intrinsic limitations of political life”.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Nectarius undermined his appeal. He associated civic idealism with his clients’ material welfare, wanting to purchase the pagans’ continued prosperity with their penitence. Of course, there were other reasons Augustine rejected the appeal. For one, he mistrusted Calama’s contrition. This paper has examined his rejection, his reasons, and his related remarks on public administration, patience, civic duties, and Christians’ deliverance in order to discover whether Augustine proposed a new religious foundation for municipal moral order. Robert Dodaro’s splendidly suggestive paper argues that he did, that Augustine developed a “politics of confession”. I have argued that he resisted politicizing piety in 408 and 409, and, more emphatically, after 410. “The pious layman . . . replace[d] the classical citizen”, to be sure, and the Calama correspondence perfectly illustrates this, John Rist’s, excellent observation, as Dodaro and I would almost certainly agree. Rist does not refer to Nectarius and to Augustine’s replies at this point in his interpretation, yet he characterizes the aforesaid “replacement” appropriately, I have maintained in my reply to Dodaro and Connolly, as “a return to the ‘natural’, ordered, but unpolitical state”.⁵¹

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3225

⁴⁸ Ep. 91.10: *Animarum nos lucra quibus adquirendis cum periculo etiam sanguinis inhiamus.*

⁴⁹ Cf., ep. 104.11-12 and Dodaro, “City”, 234.

⁵⁰ Fortin, “Justice and the Foundation of the Political Community: Augustine and his Pagan Models”, in *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, ed. Christoph Horn (Berlin, 1997), 53.

⁵¹ John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), 214-15.