

Gender's Divine Dignity in Saint Augustine's Theological Anthropology

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Introduction

IT ALL STARTED WITH BISHOP JULIAN, the leading presbyter of Eclanum (ca. 385–455), a rather important Catholic see near Benevento in the Campania region of modern-day Italy. While Augustine of Hippo had his detractors and disparagers his whole life long, Julian was the first to denounce his thoughts on marriage and human sexuality as a residual Manichaeism rendering his theology of embodiment and conjugality as something pernicious and contrary to the mind of Christ. Yet, even though Augustine successfully responded to these accusations at length, these fifth-century incriminations are recklessly still hurled today.¹ Most recently, a former Roman Catholic priest by the name of James Carroll gained the cover

¹ The work most obviously aimed at countering Julian's accusations is Augustine's *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* [hereafter, *Contra Iul.*], trans., Roland Teske, S.J., in *Answer to the Pelagians III*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century [WSA] I/25 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1999). All citations from Augustine will come from the very fine WSA series. See also here, Augustine's five treatises explicitly on the virtues of sexuality and its various expressions in the Christian life: *The Excellence of Marriage* [*De bono coniugali*], *Holy Virginity* [*De sancta virginitate*], *The Excellence of Widowhood* [*De bono viduitatis*], *Adulterous Marriages* [*De coniugiis adulterinis*], and *Continence* [*De continentia*], trans. Ray Kearney, in *Marriage and Virginity*, WSA I/9 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1999). An original version of this paper was delivered at a gathering of the Thomistic Institute at the Dominican House of Studies in the spring of 2019; I am very grateful to Dr. Yvonne Klein who wrote her dissertation on Augustine and his theology of femininity, and from whom I have learned what is truly important.

of *The Atlantic* for unleashing on Augustine and even tracing the filth of contemporary clerical abuse back to the bishop of Hippo's supposed misogyny and "repression of desire." In a derisory and colossally careless synopsis, Carroll states that the Church's preference for celibacy over marital love was brought about

by Augustine's theology of sex, derived from his reading of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis. Augustine painted the original act of disobedience as a sexual sin, which led to blaming a woman for the fatal seduction—and thus for all human suffering down through the generations. This amounted to a major revision of the egalitarian assumptions and practices of the early Christian movement. It also put sexuality, and anything related to it, under a cloud, and ultimately under a tight regime. The repression of desire drove normal erotic urges into a social and psychological netherworld.²

Of course, Carroll is not unique in his reading of Augustine in this area. In reducing this great doctor of the Church to convenient sound bites, many moderns have seen in Augustine the model of misogyny and the paragon of patriarchy.

Many feminist theologians, for example, have focused in on Augustine's insistence that Eve is brought about for no other reason than to enable the human species to continue. Studying Augustine's treatment of the Genesis narrative, Margaret Miles writes that Augustine sees Eve, "the prototype and figure of 'woman' as designed and 'built' for procreation, limited in rationality, and dangerous to men."³ From a danger to the sign of enslavement, as Elaine Pagels blames Augustine for using the Adam and Eve story to teach the natural and only true state of life for the human person is one of bondage and slavery—humans to God, and women to men.⁴ In a similar indictment, Rosemary Radford Ruether once taught that, "for Augustine, patriarchy is the natural order of society, reflecting the innate inferiority of women, their lack of capacity for headship, and their subjugation to the male as the representative of the 'image of God.'"⁵ Even psychotherapists rely on Augustine's theology to find the origins of all suppression. In a glib

² James Carroll, "Abolish the Priesthood," *The Atlantic*, June 2019, 74–84, at 79.

³ Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 97.

⁴ Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 150.

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 186.

and (of course) uncited sentence, the Jungian guru Edward Whitmont once wrote that "St. Augustine declared that women have no souls."⁶ Such comments—and we all know there are many—have in their crosshairs Augustine's perceived theology of women. As well-tilled and as raked-over as this Augustinian soil has been, scholars remain divided on the status he affords women qua women, and when we turn to what Augustine himself has to say about the sexes, we quickly realize that women are divinely and eternally intended and, in one way, needed by God to redeem humankind.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to understand Augustine's theology of gender and his theological anthropology of women in particular. Given today's discourse on gender identity and its supposed fluidity and diversity, Julian's and Carroll's incriminations will certainly again be leveled against those who stand in the mainstream of the Christian Tradition, and so it is essential to understand Augustine on his own terms and in his own words. In so doing, it is clear that what Augustine has to say about sex, gender, and the purpose of human sexuality may seem simple to some, and downright insulting to others, especially in these areas: (1) having heard of some persons with both male and female genitalia, Augustine nonetheless holds that the divinely intended way of being fully human is as male *or* female; (2) he also teaches that such a binary expression of humanity is mainly for the sake of children while also intended for other purposes, like taming the fallen libido—especially in men—as well as in its reflection of Christ's spousal union with his Church (*proles, fides, sacramentum*)⁷; and (3) that the irrevocable and unalterable nature of gender is integral to how the Father wanted to save the world, through the masculinity of his Son and the femininity of his Son's Mother. As such, we shall see how Augustine saw femininity, in both body and soul, as a needed component of salvation history and, accordingly, how this femininity equipped women to serve as models of virtue and even spiritual guides to the wayward. Finally, Augustine never wavered in his understanding that as a divinely intended good, a woman's body would last forever and shine gloriously in the final resurrection.

Therefore, let us lay all of this out in four main sections. The first will be Augustine's protology and the creation of Eve as one emerging from Adam. Here we read that he is a fairly typical man of antiquity, Eve's main

⁶ Edward C. Whitmont, *The Return of the Goddess* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 124.

⁷ Augustine, *De bono coniug.* 2.2–8.7 (Latin in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [CSEL], 41:188–97). For more on this, see Patout Burns, "Marital Fidelity as a *remedium concupiscentiae*: An Augustinian Proposal," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 1–35.

contribution to creation being her ability to bear and nurture life, *causa parienti*. The second section brings us into the economy of Christian salvation and God's choosing to be born of a woman, thereby recognizing and thus honoring both sexes in the world's redemption. The third section uncovers Augustine's appreciation for feminine wisdom and how he can therefore recommend women of virtue to help guide other members of the Church, regardless of their status or public office. Fourthly and finally, we move to the world's end to understand Augustine's unquestionable belief in the resurrection of the female body. What today sounds to us clear and certain doctrine was not something held by all the Churchmen of Augustine's day. Before we turn to these four areas, let us first look briefly at the history of sexual differentiation as found in the world in which the bishop of Hippo lived, worked, thought, and wrote, the Platonic and neo-Platonic milieu in which most Christian teaching was (to some degree) formed. In so doing, Augustine's brilliance, fidelity to scriptural truths, and sensitivity toward all will be even more appreciated.

One of the first sustained examinations into the origin and nature of sexual difference is found, as is so in many important human matters, in the works of Plato. In the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue on the essence of beauty and human *eros* which takes place in an evening of drinking, with a bit of double entendre, innuendo, and not a few choice lines, the great playwright Aristophanes is imagined conversing with the militarily charged politico Alcibiades, as well as the great philosopher Socrates. In his encomium to *eros*, Aristophanes treats the history of gender and the problem of embodiment as the fifth-century BC Greek mind saw it. Aristophanes avers that:

Our nature was not what is now, but very different. There were three kinds of humans, that's my first point—not two as there are now, male and female. In addition to these, there was a third, a combination of these two; its name survives, though the kind itself has vanished. At that time, you see, the word androgynous really meant something: a form made up of male and female elements, though now there's nothing but the word, and that's used as an insult. My second point is that the shape of each human being was completely round, with back and sides in a circle; they had four hands each, as many legs as hands, and two faces, exactly alike, on a rounded neck. Between the two faces, which were on opposite sides, was one head with four ears. There were two sets of sexual organs, and everything else was the way you'd imagine it from what I've told you. . . . In strength and power, therefore, they

were terrible, and they had great ambitions. They made an attempt on the gods.⁸

Reminiscent of elements found in the Jewish account of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), the human race became swollen with its own successes and enamored by its own greatness, taking what should have been a matter of divine thanks into divine rebellion. Unlike other classical etiological myths, however, Plato's story explains not the diversity of languages or the origins of the known globe's diverse races, but the very primal difference of gender. Here the distinction between male and female is not a gift from above but is actually an inspired punishment, a penitential reprimand resulting in a divinely mandated difference. Now the gods and goddesses of Hellenistic pantheon not only doubled their sacrifices, they ensured that now ruptured men and women would no longer be heavenly-minded but would instead spend their essential energies in the sexual searching for his or her other half.

Centuries later, as Plotinus († 270) attempted to resurrect the key tenets of Platonism and translate them into his own henology, his main disciple Porphyry (ca. 234–305) took a sort of sabbatical toward the end of his life. From this time of leisure, Porphyry wanted to exhort his wife Marcella to continue her study of philosophy in his absence. He therefore guided Marcella through the purpose of philosophy in typical Platonic fashion, to be stripped of all earthly things that weigh down the soul. The chains of corporeality and the weight of physical sensation are to be shunned by a mind made cathartic through contemplation. But in an illuminating turn, we come to read that the female sex is part of this earthly distraction and decay:

For God listens only to those who are not weighed down by alien things, and guards those who are purified from corruption. Consider it a great help towards the blessed life if the captive in the thralldom of nature takes his captor captive. For we are bound in the chains that nature has cast around us, by the belly, the throat and the other members and parts of the body, and by the use of these and the pleasant sensations that arise therefrom and the fears they occasion. But if we rise superior to their witchcraft, and avoid the snares laid by them, we lead our captor captive. Neither trouble yourself much whether you are male or female in body, *nor look on*

⁸ Plato, *Symposium* 189d–190b, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989) 25–26.

thyself as a woman, for I did not approach you as such. Flee all that is womanish in the soul, as though you had a man's body about you. For what is born from a virgin soul and a pure mind is most blessed, since imperishable springs from imperishable. But what the body produces is held corrupt by all the gods.⁹

Of course, such "gender-bending" is not limited to Greek paganism. There are rabbinic interpretations of Genesis 1:27 wherein Adam is primally both man and woman before God intervenes yet again and brings Eve away from him separately. Both Eusebius of Caesarea and Basil of Ancyra suggest this might be an accurate reading of Genesis.¹⁰ The Apostle Paul informs the Galatians that being male or female should not be an ultimate concern (see Gal 3:28), or recall how in the heat of battle, the Carthaginian martyr Perpetua recounts: "My clothes were stripped off, and suddenly I was a man [*et sum facta masculus*]."¹¹

Yet in the early Church any transformational imagery having to do with gender is precisely just that: imagery. It is symbolic or metaphorical of an office, either dominical or ecclesial. For instance, in Perpetua's case of having become *masculus*, she does so only insofar as she is conformed to Christ in her soul and in her bravery. She is still referred to as a woman (*illam*), still no doubt daughter (*Filia, pax tecum*), and now even recognized as the wife of Christ (*matrona Christi*) and God's own beloved (*Dei delicata*); while she now bears the graced office of another Christ, her female body clearly remains and is revered as such.¹² Conversely, all the baptized are called—men and women alike—to be the Bride of Christ, but this is the office of the Church in whom all are saved by receiving the great Bridegroom in an eternal embrace. Admittedly, while there were some exemplary Catholic thinkers who mitigated the beauty of Eve's femininity, who (like Augustine) called all women to be *uiriliter* in their faith, and even some contemporary Churchmen of his day who wondered

⁹ Porphyry, *Letter to Marcella* 33, trans. Alice Zimmern, in *Porphyry, the Philosopher, to his Wife Marcella* (London: George Redway, 1896), 77 (slightly adjusted).

¹⁰ See Basil of Ancyra's *Liber de uera uirginitatis integritate* 3 (PG, 30:367B–C). With so much attention to gender today, scholars have uncovered places in the Christian tradition where such a reading seems to appear—e.g., Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio euangelica* 12.12 (PG, 21:972B–D), as well as the conversation throughout Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988).

¹¹ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* 10, trans. Herbert Musurill, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 119.

¹² *Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* 10 (p. 119).

if the female body would be resurrected as female on the last day, Augustine's appreciation for the diversity of gender is theologically powerful and fruitful. Let us now look at those places where gender is of concern to him. These come in three parts: the narrative of Genesis, the economy of salvation as worked through our Lady's *fiat*, and the resurrection and restoration of the glorified body at the end of time.

Creation of Women

Understanding Augustine on the creation of Eve and the inherent feminine dignity he affords women in general, three aspects of this thought should be highlighted. The first is how Augustine reads the creation of woman from the side of man as a sign of the organic unity the Father intended for the human race on the natural level, and the same unity which would be not only restored but even divinized in the Incarnation of his Son, the New Adam (see Rom 5). If the unity of the human race is the first and foundational intent in Eve's genesis, the next is her unique role in bearing life and continuing the human race. God brings about not another man as an antidote to Adam's loneliness (see Gen 2:18), but a woman. Why so? She alone can provide more than the friendship all solitary individuals desire; she alone can give Adam both a complementarity and a fecundity that no second *vir* could. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to appreciate Augustine's estimation of Eve as *an imago Dei*. Whereas some scholars deny that Augustine accords Eve status as a divine image and likeness, he actually stands apart from much of the patristic tradition in reading Saint Paul's supposed reduction of Eve as only an image of a man (see 1 Cor 11:7) in light of Genesis's insistence that she is a man's coequal partner and companion in imaging the divine.

Whereas some in the Christian tradition have been highly critical of Genesis's description of Eve's coming forth from the side of Adam as a story of subordination and inferiority, Augustine instead here discerns the unique unity of the human race. Unlike other creatures who are created in pairs of male and female for the sole sake of propagation, the first woman's originating out of the first man is not primarily about the continuation of the human race but about its organic unity. After a beautiful litany cataloging the different creatures brought about, some solitary (e.g., Augustine names eagles, kites, lions, and wolves) and others more communal-minded (e.g., doves, starlings, deer), Augustine turns to the unique status of humanity:

In this case [God] created one single individual, but not so that man would be left alone, bereft of human society. Rather, God's purpose

was that the unity of human society and the bond of human intimacy would be all the more strongly commended to human beings if they were linked to one another not only by likeness of nature but also by the sense of kinship. In fact, he did not even create the woman who was to be united with the man in the same way that he chose to create the man himself; instead he created her out of that man, so that the human race might be wholly derived from just one man [*ex homine uno*].¹³

As we shall see next, Augustine does hold that woman is distinguished from man for the sake of procreation, but even before this, Eve's entire manner of being created has to do with her symbolizing the unity of persons the Trinity intended in bringing other persons about.

In Eve's new presence on earth, Adam hence discovers his other-centeredness, and in this communion, the human person deeply realizes how, alone, the self is incomplete and moribund. Or, as John Cavadini has so well said, "there is a prelapsarian eschatology implied in the creation of human beings from one *homo*, and the creation of Eve, in turn from that one *homo*. It is precisely the creation of Eve from Adam that signifies the distinctiveness of human solidarity. Thus, in this way, it is originally spousal. . . . It does not signify the domination of either spouse."¹⁴ While the denigrating effects of the Fall may have vitiated this intended unity and intimacy, in the beginning Eve symbolizes the equality and tenderness God desired by bringing her from Adam's side.

In a passage rich with possibility in understanding Augustine's theology of Eve, he argues that, in her appearance on earth, God intended to show us "the great benefit and power of friendship" (*uim quoque amicitiae*). That is why "God wished to produce all persons out of one, so that they would be held together in their social relationships not only by similarity of race, but also by the bond of kinship. The first natural bond of human society, therefore, is that of husband and wife."¹⁵ It is important to stress

¹³ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 12.22, trans. William Babcock, in *City of God* 11–22, WSA I/7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2013), 62 (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [CCSL] 48: 380).

¹⁴ John C. Cavadini, "Spousal Vision: Text and History in the Theology of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1-2 (2012): 127–48, at 138.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De bono coniug.* 1.1 (p. 33). For more on Augustine and other authors of his world on this image, see Catherine Coneybeare, "The Creation of Eve," *Augustinian Studies* 49, no. 2 (2018): 181–98. Coneybeare is excellent not only in her appreciation for the depths of Augustine's reflections here but providing texts of his contemporaries to show how counterculturally rich the Bishop of Hippo remains.

this aspect of Augustine's thought: the foundational and primary role of Eve is to create the bond (*uiniolum*) for which each person is created. In this she is the initial presence by whom Adam begins to realize that he is made in the image and likeness of another—not Eve, of course, but she is the one in whom Adam first senses his completion is heterotelic. Through maturation and experience, both of these other-centered human persons will have to learn (with cosmically deleterious effects) that their end is not one another but the triune God; but in the beginning, Eve is the one creature who brings about that harmony and relationality for which all of humanity was created.

In stressing this first aspect of Augustine's theological anthropology, we can move to his second feature of Eve's reason for existing with less worry over the feminist critique that Augustine reduces Eve simply to a needed agent in continuing the human race. Setting the question of the dignity and beauty of motherhood aside, we should remember that Eve has a presence even before her needed role as collaborating with Adam in procreation. As we have seen, Eve first represents how the natural completion of humanity (*homo*) is brought about, but she is also brought about *as she is as woman* for a succeeding subsequent role, for the continuing and nurturing of the human race. It is precisely she who is needed in order that the human race may fulfill the first ever command from God, to increase and multiply. In his thorough commentary *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine thus writes:

If the question is asked, though, for what purpose it was necessary for this help to be made, no more likely answer suggests itself than that it was for the sake of procreating children—in the same sort of way as the earth is a help to the seed, so that the plant may be born of each of them. This, after all, is what was said at the first establishment of things: *Male and female he made them, and God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply and fill the earth and lord it over it* (Gen 1:27–28).¹⁶

Here Augustine is very much a man of his age, reflecting the prevailing values of the society in which he lived and thought. He holds that perhaps Adam would find in another *vir* a more suitable intellectual companion and colleague, but woman is uniquely needed and thus designed for the procreation of new life.

¹⁶ *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.3.5, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., in *On Genesis*, WSA I/13 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2002), 378.

This is why Augustine does not shy away from the inherent bodily distinctions between male and female, drawing our attention primarily to Eve's *forma et distinctio membrorum*:

And so the woman, being made for the man, from the man, in that sex and shape and distinction of parts by which females are known, gave birth to Cain and Abel and all their brothers and sisters, from whom all human beings would be born. Among them she also gave birth to Seth, through whom we come to Abraham and the people of Israel and the nation now so widely known among all the nations, and to all nations through the sons of Noah. To doubt this is to undermine the foundations of everything we believe, something therefore the faithful should put entirely out of their minds. So then, when you ask what help that sex was made to provide the man with, the only thing that occurs to me after carefully considering everything to the best of my ability is that it was for the sake of having children, so that the earth might be filled from their stock.¹⁷

On this point, Eve's unique ability to bear life should not reduce her to this, as Augustine's treatises on consecrated virginity and his homilies on unmarried martyrs attest. David Hunter has rightly recognized that Eve's procreative ability "is placed from the start squarely into a social framework, that is, the bonding of society (*connexio societatis*) in the natural good of friendship. Marriage and sexual intercourse, leading to the propagation of children, are regarded as goods necessary for the greater good of friendship (*amicitia*), that is, the 'friendly association' (*societas amicalis*) which is a great good in the human race."¹⁸ In other words, Eve's ability to bear life may be a great good but it is not the greatest good, that being the intercommunion of persons in both the world and ultimately in God's Church.

In emphasizing Eve's unparalleled ability to bring about life, Augustine has been accused of detracting from her divinely imaged status, bringing us to our third point when examining Augustine's theological anthropology of Eve in particular. A generation or two ago, Radford Ruether wrote that, "in relation to man Eve stands for the body vis-a-vis the male spirit. Moreover, Augustine persists in calling this latter [her body] her nature. . .

¹⁷ *De Gen. litt.* 9.11 and 9.19 (p. 386).

¹⁸ David G. Hunter, "Sex, Marriage and Celibacy," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 153–77, at 160.

. Augustine defines the male as alone, the full image of God."¹⁹

What Ruether and a large number of feminist scholars have missed is that Augustine holds easily and dogmatically not only that Eve is unquestionably as equal a divine image and likeness as Adam, but also that Eve is an indispensable part to the fullness of Adam's own humanity. Far from the misogynist many moderns want to meet in the bishop of Hippo, Augustine is in fact the first Christian author to interpret 1 Corinthians 11:7—that man is an *imago Dei* but woman is made in the image of man—allegorically. He is the first in the great Christian Tradition to reconcile that teaching of Genesis 1:27 with 1 Corinthians 11:7 and Paul's insistence that woman should cover her head because, while man is in the image of God, she is the glory of man. Unlike Philo, who argued Adam represents *nous* (mind) while Eve is wholly sensuality, *aisthesis*; or unlike even the great Ambrose, who suggests in his commentary on Noah's ark that Adam is that part of us who is rational and contemplative while Eve is to be aligned with the external and the beastly.²⁰

At *De Trinitate* 12, however, Augustine provides posterity with a most amazing theological solution in how to read Scripture consistently and accurately. Far from being the misogynist many moderns want to see in the bishop of Hippo, he instead looks at the disciplinary mandate of 1 Corinthians 11:7 in light of the creation story of Adam in Even in Genesis 1. He then begins to lay out his argument, that every human person possesses a "kind of conscious activity, [and] while it is carried on with sensible things and with what the consciousness has imbibed from them through the senses of the body, it is nonetheless not without its share in reason, and so it is *not common* to man and beast."²¹ That is, the human soul, created for a heavenly life but made to live in this world of time and space, is uniquely poised with two distinct but related activities, one that is necessary to make our way in the world of sensible things and the other which participates in eternal *ratio*. The former Augustine calls *scientia*, the latter *sapientia*. As Adam and Eve perfectly complemented one another to make up one couple, *sapientia* and *scientia* need one another so the pilgrim can make his or her way in this world of transient and material goods in such a way so as to achieve our heavenly homeland. In this way, Augustine overlooks the silliness of the question whether Eve is a divine image, for

¹⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 156.

²⁰ See Ambrose, *De Noe et arca* 92.

²¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12.2, trans. Edmund Hill, in *The Trinity*, WSA I/5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2015), 410 (emphasis mine).

Genesis unequivocally states so; what he so innovatively and faithfully accomplishes is to recast Paul's apparent subordination of woman from the ontological to the epistemological.

That is, in Augustine's view, Paul is clearly not talking about men and women per se, but the two aspects of the human soul, the scientific and the sapiential. For, Augustine a little later asks: "Is there anyone who would exclude females from this association, seeing that together with us men they are fellow heirs of grace?"²² In fact, at one point Augustine actually worries if Adam would retain his status as a divine image if Eve left his side: "Now what are we to say to this? If the woman in her own person completes the Trinity, why is the man still called the image of God when she has been extracted from his side?"²³

In paralleling Adam with *sapientia* and Eve with *scientia*, the human couple is complete; the human *anima* is complete. However, is Augustine misogynistic in giving Adam the eternal role and Eve the earthly form of knowledge? In his estimation, no. Why not? In his experience, Adam's body proves more unchanging, not blessed or burdened, with the ability to undergo the changes in bearing life, not experiencing the monthly changes involved in the ability to menstruate, lactate, and all the many ways the female body must develop in order to bring about and care for an infinite other. And where Augustine detects difference, he looks for order. The order is provided in Paul's teaching that women cover their physical heads because a spiritual covering would make absolutely no sense; for internally and eternally, men and women are unquestionably and equally created divine images and likenesses. The difference comes in their bodily status, and it is here that Augustine's Platonism comes into play: to be real is to be immutable, to have worth and value and integrity means to be united to that which is unchanging. Due to the inherent mutability of a woman's body and not her soul, the bishop insists that a head covering achieves two outcomes: it reminds a woman that she is much more than her bodily changes and it helps men not reduce women to their bodies.

Women are to veil in liturgy not because they are lascivious objects, "representing the shameful, sinful carnality which put the barrier between God and humanity in the first place," as Kim Power in *Veiled Desire* argues.²⁴ Instead, let us listen to Augustine's own words: "Well, it is only because woman differs from the man in the sex of her body that her bodily covering could suitably be used to symbolize that part of the reason which

²² Augustine, *De Trin.* 12.12 (p. 422).

²³ Augustine, *De Trin.* 12.9 (p. 418).

²⁴ Kim Power, *Veiled Desire* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 154.

is diverted to the management of temporal affairs, signifying that the mind of man [*homo*] does not remain the image of God except in the part which adheres to the eternal ideas to contemplate or consult them: and it is clear that females have this as well as males.”²⁵

This stress on the complementarity of man and woman comes through not just in Augustine's theological treatises, but it is a point he needs to get across to the average Christian seated in his parish, living in the world. That is why in Sermon 262 he again advances the veil by signaling the dignity of women and inverting the *doxa* in Paul, now calling the woman the glory of man:

What, after all, can “and over all the earth your glory” mean, but over all the earth your Church, over all the earth your wife, over all the earth your bride, your beloved, your dove, your consort? *She is your glory*. “The man indeed,” says the apostle, “ought not to veil his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.” If the woman is the glory of the man, the Church is the glory of Christ.²⁶

Our bishop is not afraid to invert scriptural images if the overall theology is consistent with the story of Scripture.²⁷ Are husband and wife not the glory of one another; are not all created persons equally glorious before the Father? For there is no doubt in Augustine's mind that woman qua woman is created toward the image and likeness of God just as fully as the man. Too, he well understands that the difference from the man that woman manifests is due primarily to the fact that she is needed to bear and bring about new life for the continuation of the human race, and that it is in Eve's body that she is most “other” from Adam.

In this line of argument, Augustine is implicitly committing himself to

²⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* 12.12 (p. 422–23).

²⁶ Augustine, Sermon 262, no. 5, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 7*, WSA IIII/7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1993), 214 (emphasis mine).

²⁷ One of the more significant inversions Augustine takes upon himself but actually attributes to Scripture is his cavalier gloss on 1 John 4:8, arguing that if God is love then love is God. For more on this, see: T. J. van Bavel, “The Double Face of Love in St. Augustine—The Daring Inversion: Love is God,” *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 26, no. 3 (1986): 69–80; Roland Teske, S.J., “Augustine's Inversion of 1 John 4:8,” *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 49–60; Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love For God and Neighbor in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993); David Meconi, *On Self-Harm, Narcissism, Atonement and the Vulnerable Christ* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019): 148–53.

the position that being either male or female exhausts how God intended human gender to be expressed. Any gender outside of these two options is not possibly “fluid,” nor is sexual identity able to be determined by the created will, regardless how insistent. This is obviously to wade into a twenty-first-century debate, and while such a conversation would surely sound alien to the ears of a fifth-century bishop, Augustine did know of people who did not fit easily into the binary expression of either male or female.²⁸ Be that as it may, let us now move to how this primal and loving complementarity between man and woman is consecrated by the advent of Jesus Christ, God-made-man, born of a woman.

Woman and the Story of Christian Salvation

Augustine’s most usual treatment when looking at the particular significance of gender in the Christian story is to delineate clearly the masculinity of Jesus from the femininity of our Lady. Both are obviously good and intended by God but in becoming man and being born of woman; the second person of the Trinity aims to incorporate both genders into his salvific descent. For example, in Sermon 190 the people of Hippo hear:

But the fact is, God himself created both sexes, male and female; and that’s why he wished to honor each sex in his birth, having come to liberate each of them. You know, of course, about the first man’s fall, how the serpent didn’t dare speak to the man, but made use of the woman’s services to bring him down. Through the weaker, he gained hold of the stronger; and by infiltrating through one of them he triumphed over both. In order, therefore, to make it impossible for us with a show of righteous, horrified indignation, to put all the blame for our death on the woman, and to believe that she is irredeemably damned; that’s why the Lord, *who came to seek what was lost*, (Lk 19:10) wished to do something for each sex by honoring them both, because both had got lost. In neither sex, then, should we wrong the creator; the birth of the Lord encouraged each to hope

²⁸ At *De civ.* 16.8, Augustine catalogs various unusual situations of human existence, what he calls “monstrous births” (“monstrosus . . . partubus”). Included here are the “very rare” cases of people being born with signs of both male and female genitalia, those whom he calls *androgyni* or *hermaphroditi*. He first raises the possibility that perhaps God the great Craftsman formed these people so in a wisdom much above our own; but then concludes that (1) perhaps these stories are untrue, (2) perhaps these races are not human, or (3) if they are, they are certainly children of the first Adam (“ . . . omnino nulla sunt; aut si sunt, homines non sunt; aut ex Adam sunt, si homines sunt”).

for salvation. The male sex is honored in the flesh of Christ; the female is honored in the mother of Christ.²⁹

Augustine clearly has not escaped a sort of ancient reproach, blaming Eve's weakness for the Fall; but he is nothing short of adamant that this does not put all the blame on her and that this primal act of disobedience is by no means to be translated into her damnation. In fact, we are forbidden to "wrong the creator," to blame God, for either sex, as both being divinely intended and needed.

Given the neat corollaries upon which Augustine insists when thinking this way, it may not surprise to hear that at other times this application of men being honored through Christ and women through Mary takes on a recapitulative tone: "Let men rejoice, let women rejoice. Christ has been born a man; he has been born of a woman; and each sex has been honored. Now therefore, let everyone, having been condemned in the first man, pass over to the second. It was a woman who sold us death; a woman who bore us life."³⁰

While Augustine does not shy away from pointing to Eve's role in disobeying God, she nonetheless remains God's beloved daughter, and so the Father devises a plan in which Eve can now redeem not only herself but the entire race by allowing the Son of God to be born of her. In so doing, God shows the world how beautiful the process of human conception and birth really is, pointing especially at the female womb and how it is not the place where defilement occurs. In Sermon 51 (dated around 418) we thus hear:

So then in order to do this, our Lord Jesus Christ became a son of man by being born of course of a woman. But supposing he hadn't been born of the virgin Mary, would he have been any the less so? . . . You say, "Why should he choose a woman in order to get born?" The answer you get is, "Why should he avoid a woman in order to get born?" Suppose I am not able to show why he should choose to be born of a woman; you must still show me what he ought to avoid in a woman. But really we have been through it all before; if he had avoided a woman's womb, it would rather have indicated that he could be defiled by it. But in fact, the more undefiled he was in his own proper being, the less reason he had

²⁹ Augustine, Sermon 190, no. 2, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 6*, WSA III/6 (Hyde Park, NY: 1993), 39.

³⁰ Augustine, Sermon 184, no. 2, trans. Edmund Hill, in WSA III/6, 18.

to shrink from a bodily womb, as though he could be defiled by it. But instead, by being born of a woman, he would bring home to us a point of great significance.³¹

So, notice Augustine's pedagogy here: God chose to be born of a woman to reveal to us some mystery, namely the dignity of human motherhood from conception to birth. If God names this, what is perhaps the quintessence of human corporeality, something not only metaphysically good but even making it personally necessary for him to save the human race, how could any mortal find such an event loathsome? Augustine thus continues:

After all, brothers, I too am perfectly ready to admit that if the Lord had wanted to become man without being born of woman, it would have been something quite easy for his sovereign majesty to achieve. Just as he was able to be born of a woman without a man, so he could have been born without even a woman. But what he is showing us here is that in neither of its sexes need humanity despair of itself. Human beings, of course, are divided by sex into males and females. So if, while appearing as a man—and I agree he had to be that—he had not been born of a woman, women would have despaired of themselves, remembering their first sin, how it was through a woman that the first man was ensnared, and would have thought that there was absolutely no hope for them in Christ. So he came as a man to select his preference for the male sex [*praelegere sexum virilum*], and he was born of a woman to comfort the female sex.³²

Augustine rarely entertains the possibility of God's acting other than what he reads in Scripture and lives enacted in the Church, but here he admits that perhaps the Son of God could have somehow become human without being born of a woman. However, this option is judged to be unbefitting and contrary to God's perfect goodness. God chose to complement his becoming a man (*vir*) with his need to be born of a woman. In so doing, both sexes are again granted their original paradisiacal dignity, irreducibly different but necessarily complementary.

This is the theological anthropology behind a wonderful insight by the Anglican divine Eric Mascall († 1991). He pointed out that, while masculinity may see its apex assumed to a divine person, we human persons must

³¹ Augustine, Sermon 51, no. 3, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 3*, WSA III/3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001), 21.

³² Augustine, Sermon 51, no. 3 (p. 21–22).

look to the femininity of Mary to see our greatest fulfillment:

It was male human nature the Son of God united to His divine person; it was a female human person who was chosen to be His mother. On the other hand, no male human person was chosen to be the Messiah, . . . and no female human nature was assumed by a divine person. Thus from one point of view the Incarnation exalts the male above the female while from another point of view it exalts the female sex above the male. In no woman has human nature been raised to the dignity which it possesses in Jesus of Nazareth, but in no male human person has there been given the dignity comparable to that which Mary enjoys as the Mother of God.³³

This is how Augustine can highlight the interplay between Jesus and Mary, that both men and women can see the fullness of their engendered selves. By not only gazing upon but appropriating the Gospel story and the life offered us through its Church's sacraments, men and women can finally know the salvific meaning of their very own bodies.

Augustine accordingly continues in Sermon 51:

It's as though he made them a little speech and said, "To show you that it's not any creature of God's that is bad, but that it's crooked pleasures that distort them, in the beginning when I made man, I made them male and female. I don't reject and condemn any creature that I have made. Here I am, born a man, born of a woman. So I don't reject any creature I have made, but I reject and condemn sins, which I didn't make. Let each sex take note of its proper honor, and each confess its iniquity, and each hope for salvation."³⁴

In the Christ event, the ultimate dignity of each sex is revealed. Before the fallen corruptions inaugurated by sin, *in the beginning*, God willed that there be two and only two genders: "I made them male and female. I don't reject and condemn anything I have made," Augustine reminds us. This binary essentialism is consecrated at the Annunciation: incarnate as a man and born of a woman, this babe in Bethlehem shows the world how the Father intended sex, gender, the body, human relationships, and the family to be.

We have seen that for Augustine this divine design is neither the result

³³ Eric Mascall, "The Ministry of Women," *Theology* 57, no. 413 (1954): 428.

³⁴ Augustine, Sermon 51, no. 3 (p. 22).

of punishment nor something temporary and ephemeral. Men as men and women as women shall rise on the last day and their unique differences will sparkle throughout all eternity, giving praise to their Creator who makes all things good and who resurrects all things new. Let us now turn to the third section and the resurrected body which will perdure forever more.

Feminine Wisdom and Ability to Guide Spiritually

In his theology of creation, salvation, and eschatology, Augustine never wavers that the female sex is intended and even needed by God. Eve was God's gambit in opening Adam up to his need for personal intimacy, and the first Eve's ability to receive and bring forth life was part of God's plan both to propagate the human race and to redeem it in the Second Eve. But this is not a gift which is merely biological; women also are able to help men grow in virtue. More than once will the bishop of Hippo hold up everyday women as living examples of what men should be. While he never doubts that a woman's primary role is to bear children and that a husband's superiority over his wife is divinely intended, he also stresses a mutual servitude—looking at 1 Corinthians 7:4—and even argues that the strength of the women martyrs far outmans the lukewarm Christian's. He thus instructs the men of Chusa:

You are told, *You shall not commit adultery*, that is, do not go to any other woman except your wife. But what *you* do is demand this duty *from* your wife, while declining to pay this duty *to* your wife. And while you ought to lead your wife in virtue (chastity is a virtue, you know), you collapse under one assault of lust. You want your wife to conquer; you yourself lie there, conquered. And while you are the head of your wife, she goes ahead of you to God, she whose head you are.³⁵

At least in this essential virtue of chastity, Augustine is explicit that women outrun men in self-mastery. In fact, it seems that, at least in this instance, wives are burdened leading their husbands, and we hear Augustine chide the men and exhort them to be the head. Saint Paul instructs them to be in Ephesians 5.

The bishop reveres such a woman with the highest of praise—"Illa enim casta et sancta femina et uere christiana"—and therefore recommends that

³⁵ Sermon 9, no. 3, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 1*, WSA III/1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001), 261.

men listen to their wives when it comes to what is essential to true virtue. This is why a bit later in this same homily, we learn:

Christ speaks in the hearts of good women, he speaks inside where the husband doesn't hear him, because he doesn't deserve to if he is that sort of man. So he speaks inwardly and consoles his daughter with words like this, "Are you distressed about your husband's wrongful behavior, what he has done to you? Grieve, but don't imitate him and behave badly yourself, but let him imitate you in behaving well. Insofar as he behaves badly, don't regard him as your head, but me." After all, if he is the head even insofar as he behaves badly, the body is going to follow its head, and both go head over heels to their ruin. To avoid following her bad head, let her hold fast to the head of the Church, Christ.³⁶

Is Augustine then saying that women are typically more capable of hearing Christ's voice? At least when it comes to tempering sexual urges, Augustine does insist that women are naturally Christ's brides and therefore perhaps more clearly conformed to such nuptial intimacy.

If we here draw from Cavadini's work once again, we come to see how Augustine's refusal to equate passions with emotions allows him to see that the sexual urge is a natural—albeit fallen—movement (*motus*) of the human soul and not therefore something that cannot be consecrated to Christ. Sexual passion bears bad fruit only if it is fruit of a bad tree, Cavadini here drawing from *City of God* 14.13—but, he shows, if the "will is right, that is, fixed in love of God, in charity, then, the emotions will be right."³⁷ As Cavadini makes clear, sexual urges are in and of themselves morally neutral, necessary movements for the good and beneficial continuation of the human race. But lust has tainted men more than women, evidenced by the lack of control of a man's sexual organ, the fact that we cover such parts, and the obvious custom of moving children from the place and time of engaging in the very act that brought each of them about in the first place.³⁸ Lust, as Cavadini argues, is the result of an enslaved (because fallen) imagination, a desire for a pleasure apart from the Creator of pleasure: "This causes shame because, paradoxically, it belies the mythos of self-sufficiency to which pride is committed. It is the sole external indi-

³⁶ Sermon 9, no. 11 (p. 269).

³⁷ John C. Cavadini, "Feeling Right: Augustine on the Passions and Sexual Desire," *Augustinian Studies* 36:1 (2005) 195–217, at 201.

³⁸ Augustine, *De civ.* 14.15–17.

cator or sign that the claim to self-sufficiency, to sovereignty, is a lie.”³⁹

Is it Eve’s natural state of being the sign of other-centeredness that allows her to be more faithful, more sensitive to the lies and sins against otherness, primarily sexual sins? Augustine never makes this claim directly, but it can certainly be a faithful reading of his instructions to husbands against lusting for their wives. This is no doubt why we hear women being held up not simply as masters of the intellect, as in the case with Monica in the early dialogues, but more importantly as chaste and faithful heralds of the Gospel:

Man was ensnared through a woman administering poison; let man be restored through a woman administering salvation. Let woman compensate for the sin of the man ensnared through her by giving birth to the Christ. That too is why women were the first to tell the apostles about God rising from the dead. A woman brought the news of death to her man in paradise; and women too brought the news of salvation to men in the Church. The apostles were to carry the news of Christ’s resurrection to the nations; the news was brought to the apostles by women. Nobody, therefore, should belittle Christ for being born of a woman, the sex that could not defile him as liberator, the sex to which he owed a testimonial as creator.⁴⁰

It seems that women as *ecclesiae* look more ardently for Christ because they historically were the first to lose him in Eve.

It is this sort of natural affinity to the bride of Christ that enables Augustine to recommend women as spiritual directors to even bishops. In a fascinating episode of his life, Bishop Augustine had appointed a young man, whom he had trained in his monastery, by the name of Antoninus, to become the bishop of Fussala, a small but important see in Numidia, about forty miles away from Hippo Regius. Fussala was in need of a Catholic leader since the Donatist proscription of 412 resulted in many former Catholics returning to the Church. A combination of this young man’s abilities and a shortage of capable candidates at the time forced Augustine to consecrate Antoninus a bishop when Augustine’s original choice had recused himself at the last moment; the only problem was that Antoninus was only a bit over twenty years old, requiring the suspending of canonical norms.

³⁹ Cavadini, “Feeling Right,” 204.

⁴⁰ Augustine, Sermon 51, no. 3 (p. 22). For more on this episode in Augustine’s life, see Neil B. McLynn, “Administrator: Augustine in His Diocese,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 310–22, at 318–21.

Thereafter, puffed up with his own successes, Antoninus proceeded to plunder the assets of the church of Fussala so badly that the people demanded his removal. In 421 Augustine called for a local tribunal to depose Antoninus, even calling in Pope Celestine for his advice in such a delicate matter.⁴¹

Toward the end of 422, Augustine turned to a holy laywoman he believed would be able to get through to Antoninus. In Epistle 20, the bishop of Hippo implored this wise, older woman named Fabiola to assist Antoninus, as only she can. Her years and her femininity were perhaps precisely the way this young priest would return to the ecclesial fidelity and episcopal vocation to which God has called him. This is a most enduring missive, Fabiola's missive being addressed to her as *Dominæ religiosissimæ et præstantissimæ*—a most religious and excellent Lady. This letter offers a unique insight into Augustine's willingness to let "leadership" be found not in office but in charism. Throughout the letter Fabiola's femininity is sought out as the way Antoninus might perhaps listen to the Lord's own voice. She has already welcomed this wayward son into her home and has cared for his basic needs, and has thus earned the right to be heard and listened to, even by a bishop. Augustine therefore writes:

Let him hear this from you, I beg, and do not keep from him whatever the Lord gives you to say to the man over whose soundness of heart I desire to rejoice. After all, you have in relation to him such an age that you can properly show him the affection of a mother. For, unless he is living under God's very great anger, he does not disdain in you the advice of his own mother. I know that you have *risen with Christ so that you seek the things that are above, not those on earth* (Col 3:1); do not, then, be afraid to give the advice of a believer to a bishop who is seeking the things of earth. You are in fact seeking God in this world; he is seeking this world in the Church.⁴²

Holiness is obviously a matter not of ecclesial power but of personal surrender and fidelity, and this Fabiola has well over her Church leaders. But she has it in a maternal and therefore accessible way, a gift of counsel that enables her to enter the lives and souls of others in ways that are not open to priests or bishops.

⁴¹ See Augustine's Letter 209, to Celestine, an illuminating instance of the interaction of pope and local bishops and how to adjudicate ecclesial disputes on the local level.

⁴² Augustine, Letter 20*, no. 28, trans. Roland Teske, in *Letters Volume 4*, WSA II/4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2005), 311.

The Female Body, Redeemed and Resurrected

Finally, it is fitting to end with what Augustine saw in the end, never wavering from his commitment to the view that the two genders divinely created at the beginning would also be God's glory in eternity as well. It is an Augustinian mainstay that God chooses to mend rather than end any part of his good creation and the engendered body is no different. He therefore can teach:

In eternal life we shall all be equal. For while we shall sparkle [*fulgebunt*] in different ways according to our various deserts, some more, some less, as far as eternal life is concerned, it will be the same for all. . . . There will be a different kind of sparkle for the chaste fidelity of couples, and for the untouched virginity of the single. . . . Yet as regards living forever, this person won't live more than that one, nor that one than this one. After all, they will live without end, every one of them alike, while they each live in their own proper kind of glory.⁴³

The "sparkle" each of our lives both receives from and redounds back to God is how each creature realizes his or her unique and unrepeatability dignity. Each of us, male or female, married or virgin, return to God a personalized gift from the graces he originally imparted to each of us. Or as Augustine preaches on the Feast of the martyr Saint Lawrence in 417, picking up on a beautiful trope of the diversity of Christian vocations being a garden, "including not only the roses of martyrs, but also the lilies of the virgins, and the ivy of married people, and the violets of the widows."⁴⁴ There is no state of life, there is no gender, in which anyone is somehow outside a holy vocation, but each in his or her own way.

Furthermore, while Augustine does not mention gender explicitly in his language of this "great exchange," it is implied: the humanity offered to the Son of God is at once what makes his death and our true life possible. Or as he tells his congregation around 412: "We had nothing of our own by which we could really live, and he had

⁴³ Augustine, Sermon 87, no. 6, trans. Edmund Hill, in WSA III/3, 410. See also Sermon 96, no. 9: "The integrity of virgins has its place there; the continence of widows has its place there; the modesty of the married has its place there; adultery has no place there" (trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 4*, WSA III/4 [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001], 33–34).

⁴⁴ Augustine, Sermon 304, no. 2, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 8*, WSA III/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001), 317.

nothing of his very own by which he could really die. Accordingly, he struck a wonderful bargain with us, a mutual give and take: ours was what he died by; his was what we might live by.⁴⁵ Or again, at the concluding line of a sermon delivered on the Feast of the Ascension in 417: "What a marvelous exchange [*o magna mutatio*]! Live by what is his, because he died with what is yours."⁴⁶ It is the interplay between divinity and humanity that makes the union of God and man possible; it was the "yes," *fiat mihi*, of a woman that allows the mutual participation of God in humanity and humanity in God.

Yet, worried that a false reading of Ephesians 4:13 and the *complete manhood* in which we shall all rise may expunge the womanhood of half of God's celestial Church, Augustine vigorously defends the resurrection of woman and the female body. At the end of time, we are informed that, while some people do hold that all resurrected bodies will return to the original Adamic male, Augustine is far from that view. Since femininity is a divinely willed counterpart to masculinity, both will be preserved for eternity. He writes:

All faults will be removed from those bodies, but their nature will be preserved. And female sex is not a fault but rather a matter of nature, and it will then be exempt from intercourse and childbirth. The female organs will still be present. Now, however, they will be accommodated not to their former use but to a new beauty which will not excite the lustful desire of the beholder, for there will be no lust. Instead they will evoke praise for the wisdom and compassion of God, who both created what was not and freed what he created from corruption.⁴⁷

It is indisputable that Augustine understands that the man is no more part of God's intended creation, no more of a divine image and likeness, and no more a resurrected gender than woman.

Here Augustine also admits that each sex has its own peculiar patterns of iniquity. However, note carefully that, while the female body may occasion the particularly masculine sin of lust, Augustine never blames the woman qua woman for the wandering eyes of men. In fact, men must learn to gaze upon her beauty rightly if they are ever to appreciate it fully. So, while it is true that from both the world in which he lived and the life

⁴⁵ Augustine, Sermon 218C, no. 1, trans. Edmund Hill, in WSA III/6, 194.

⁴⁶ Augustine, Sermon 265D, trans. Edmund Hill, in WSA III/7:259.

⁴⁷ *De civ.* 22.17 (p. 526).

in which he lived it, Augustine seems never to disconnect the female body from the demon of lust, such passages on the new heaven and the new earth make it clear that he does not blame the woman's body, but rather the lascivious man's fallen desire. What God had created in the beginning will be consummated at the end, Adam and Eve becoming the redeemed forerunners of Christ and his Church, the harmonious union of male and female which saves the world.

Conclusion

Augustine's theology and pastoral concerns bespeak a man whose experience with woman may have affected his candor and care, but which has also shown him the unique gifts and insight of women. He looks for ways to correct misogynistic readings of Scripture and ways to correct the Christian tradition that preceded him. He is no doubt a bishop who understands the power of the women in his parish and how they in fact lead their husbands in what is most essential in the Christian life. Some of his positions may border on the stereotypical to many of us today, for example in thinking women are more naturally chaste and given to the virtue of purity than men, but his experience and interactions with the people of North Africa seems to confirm and sustain his message and approach.

This essay has set out to show how Augustine understood male and female as God-given ways of being fully human. He has heard of and may have even interacted with those he calls *androgyni* and *hermaphroditi*, and while he does not have much to say about their state in life, he does insist that they are images and likenesses of God worthy of full human dignity and the respect of all with whom they come into contact. The norm for Augustine, against much of today's movements, is a body either inceptive or receptive of life. The gender manifested in male and female is precisely for that, for the ongoing creation of the human race. Even without sin, man and woman would experience that fruitful desire for sexual union, albeit without the spiritual lust and bodily pain which can often arise from human intercourse. The creation of the human person as either man or woman is for Augustine therefore the first real gift to the human, the first real way of being human, either male or female.

Too, in the story of Christian salvation, each gender has an essentially unique and un-exchangeable role to play: God is born as a man from a woman. Neither gender is above the other qua gender, and as reliant as Mary is upon her God for all that she is, the Son of God is similarly wholly dependent upon her to be who he is as human and as our vulnerable savior. As God, he did not have the capacity to be slain and sacrificed, while fallen humankind did not have that which is required for everlasting life

and unalloyed joy. So, "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), the Son of God comes to be born as a male human only through the free assent of a female human, and in this divinely designed drama involving male and female, the salvation of the world begins and continues.

It is a salvation effected only by the cooperation of God the Father and the Church our Mother. The Christian story is thus an interplay between the masculine and the feminine; the Church is not a "single sex" family, but the loving harmony between God our Father and the Church our Mother, a lesson the Donatists especially needed to learn:

If any, though, have cut themselves off from the Church by the division of schism, even though they may seem to themselves to be holding on to the Father, they are most perniciously forsaking their mother, while those who relinquish both Christian faith and mother Church [*fidem christianam et matrem ecclesiam*] are deserting both parents. Hold on to your Father, hold on to your mother. You are a little child; stick to your mother [*inhaere matri*]. You are a little child, suck your mother's milk, and she will bring you, nourished on milk, to the table of the Father.⁴⁸

Never one to shy away from the unique gifts of women, Augustine draws from fairly erotic imagery to describe the work of the Church, to bear children, to wash, feed, and teach God's sons and daughters.

This is a femininity that is also continued personally for all time: the human body is created and will therefore be redeemed as engendered, both male and female. Augustine is clearly neither a corporeally suspicious gnostic nor a Christian overly influenced by terribly oriental readings of Scripture: the man Jesus Christ is born of a woman in order to unite himself to a receptive bride, the Church, where the pristine masculinity and femininity will be redeemed and live joyfully precisely as male or female. What takes away from each gender will of course be removed and the fullness of what it means to be a man or woman will never shine as brightly as there where all things will realize their perfection.

As such, Augustine's theology of gender in general, and his theology of womanhood and marriage in particular, is far from the problem of today's

⁴⁸ Augustine, Sermon 198, no. 2, trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons Volume 11 (Newly Discovered)*, WSA III/11 (Hyde Park NY: New City, 2001), 212. This sermon is among a group not discovered until 1990, found by François Dobleau in a fifteenth-century Carthusian manuscript now preserved in the state library in Mainz; in that collection it lists as Dobleau no. 26 and Mainz no. 62.

Church, as some like Carroll and others aver. Rather, what the bishop of Hippo has to say about God's love, humanity's "sparkle," and the beauty of an eternal nuptiality between the two is a corrective to today's confusion about the supposed inconsequentiality (or even toxicity) of being gifted eternally as either a man or a woman. It is here that salvation occurs, between the freely-uttered "yes" of a woman and the sacred flesh of her male Son. Augustine's honesty in looking at the complementary interplay between male or female also guides the contemporary mind into rightly understanding the Church's teaching on the beauty, as well as the burdens of the sacraments of Holy Matrimony of Holy Orders and the engendered dignity of being made in the image and likeness of the triune God. N.V.