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An Augustinian Correction to a Faulty Option: The Politics of Salt and Light

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SINCE ITS PUBLICATION IN 2017, Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* has given rise to a cottage industry, including a wide range of publications on the subject (either in support of or against) and conferences across the country. To be sure, a Christian perspective fully supports many elements in Dreher's thought, like his calls for homes to become places of spiritual learning and growth,[1] that institutions of Christian education take seriously their role in Christian formation,[2] and the Church undergo a *ressourcement* type of renewal in all facets of its life.[3] However, it is in the last area of ecclesiology where Dreher's option ultimately fails in several ways because he does not grasp the full import of the sacramental ontology. While he rightly advocates a need for recovering it, he falls short in implementing it.[4] His is, put simply, a failure of the imagination which has disastrous consequences for his understanding of how the church ought to engage in the political sphere.

In order to demonstrate this failure, I adopt Dreher's *ressourcement* methodology[5] by engaging Augustine of Hippo as the primary interlocutor and proceeding by way of four main steps. First, I discuss three ways Dreher's work represents a failure of imagination. With the second step, I lay out Augustine's sacramental metaphysics and corresponding ecclesiology. For the third step, I consider how Augustine understands the Church's existence this side of eternity. Finally, I sketch the basics of the politics of salt and light, an approach to Christian political engagement supported by the legacies of both Augustine and Benedict.

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[1] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 125.
[2] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 147–150.
[3] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 103–105.
[4] See Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 24, 27, 108, 111.
[5] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 105.

A Failure of Imagination

Dreher characterizes *The Benedict Option* as an imaginative *ressourcement* of an ancient worldview. The worldview he writes of is best termed sacramental, where the spiritual and material aspects of reality exist in a porous and interpenetrating relationship with one another.[6] It is this worldview, Dreher says (and here we agree), Christians of today must recover so that we might "withstand the torrents of liquid modernity."[7] It is perhaps, then, something of an irony that he turns to the *Rule* of Benedict of Nursia as the basis for his work, seeing as he writes of the *Rule* that "modern readers who turn to it looking for mystical teaching of fathomless spiritual depth will be disappointed. Benedict's spirituality is wholly practical."[8] In placing these ideas next to one another at the beginning of an overview of Dreher's work, what I am highlighting is a dissonance between his theoretical basis and the practical implementation thereof, whereas there ought to be a harmonious flow from one to the other. As will be demonstrated in the last part of this essay, the ancient, sacramental worldview Dreher wishes to recapture, understands the mystical to fully penetrate and make itself present precisely in and through the practical. This dissonance, I contend, is the result of an interpretive and ecclesial failure of imagination on the part of Dreher.

Dreher's interpretive failure is twofold, one for each of his two main sources of inspiration: Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and the *Rule* of Benedict. It is no secret that Dreher is taking his inspiration not from Benedict of Nursia but from MacIntyre. This is seen in Dreher's characterization of his option, along with its "strategic withdrawal," as that which had been "prophesied by MacIntyre."[9] Dreher is here referring to the final lines of the first edition of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, wherein he penned that the survival of the tradition of the virtues today awaited the arrival of "another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict."[10] Dreher's shortcomings, I suggest, begin with the failure to account for MacIntyre's "doubtless very different" qualification. The main movement of MacIntyre's work has been one of development via engagement with society, as evidenced by his taking seriously some of the criticisms of those with different viewpoints,[11] his attempt to understand those working from a different tradition with the aim of arriving at a common basis of moral dialogue,[12] and in his

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[6] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 24.
[7] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 108.
[8] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 15.
[9] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 15.
[10] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 263.
[11] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xiv-xv, 264–278.
[12] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 326–348, 396–403.

most recent monograph, his attempt to think through the difficulty of compartmentalization faced by the individual attempting to live a life of virtue in a society driven primarily by utilitarian concerns.[13] This is an attempt to preserve and develop a tradition that looks "very different" than the approach taken by St. Benedict but with the same aim of individual and communal transformation. Such an attempt is in harmony with the historical operation of the tradition. By contrast, Dreher's main movement is one of preservation via estrangement and is foreign to the tradition. This basic difference, more evidence of which will be provided below, in movement and aim is seen both in that Dreher has relatively little to say about what virtue actually is and in his reminiscing of a foregone era of virtuous Christian life in America.[14]

Dreher's mishandling of MacIntyre's discussion on virtue relates to his misinterpretation of *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (RB). Without denying the practicality of RB, the contention that the *Rule* is not at one and the same time mystical is a misreading by Dreher. RB is an outline by which one may incarnate the Gospel in one's own life. In the prologue, Benedict writes that by the grace of God working within us (RB 4–7), and by "listening carefully" to the voice of God in scripture (RB 1–3), we may "translate into action, as we should, his holy teachings" (RB 35). It is this dynamic, of translating scripture into action by the grace of God that constitutes the life of virtue for Benedict, making it by its very definition, mystical. This, however, is not a modern understanding of virtue but a patristic understanding. This is one reason why Augustine will prove himself an insightful interlocutor. Not only is his general influence on RB well documented,[15] but his work provides an understanding of the patristic notion of virtue at work in the RB.

This failure to understand the distinction between the two traditions of virtue has consequences for the ecclesiological failure of Dreher's position. In the prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre anticipates one of the shortcomings of Dreher's option when he refuses the type of conservatism advocated by the latter. MacIntyre writes that such politically conservative moralist approaches are "as alien to the projects of *After Virtue* as liberalism is," functioning as "one more stock character in the scripted conversations of the ruling elites of advanced modernity. But those elites never have the last

[13] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), xi, 166–186, 231–242.

[14] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 37, 41, 99, 173.

[15] See Adalbert de Vogüé, *A Critical Study of the Rule of Benedict*, Vol. 1, trans. Colleen Maura McGrane (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013), 10–13; Columba Stewart, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 19, 78, 81.

word."[16] While he does not explicitly advocate the exact same type of political conservatism MacIntyre is describing, Dreher's anti-political political engagement that sets up a "parallel *polis*" is extreme conservative politics.[17] Dreher's primary interest seems to be recapturing some idealized American moral past, one that reclaims "the world from the artifice, alienation, and atomization of modern life."[18] While Benedict is often credited with saving and preserving Western Civilization, this was not his primary aim. In contradistinction to Dreher's option, Benedict was not attempting to preserve a specific cultural form of life but rather a Christian way of life, period.[19] Sr. Joan Chittister and Gregory the Great write of the preservation of the incarnational spirituality that is the Christian way of life,[20] making of Benedict and his communities not creators of a parallel society but transformational agents of existing society.[21] Thus, in highlighting the rebirthing of a civilization, Dreher's focus seems to be political in ways opposed to MacIntyre.[22]

This ecclesiological distortion leads to a corresponding distortion in his understanding of the Church's engagement in the political life of society. Instead of the Church's functioning as the sacrament of salvation in the world, for Dreher, it is the sacrament of salvation for a few. For instance, he writes that the motivation for living the option he lays out is not to "save the West. We are only trying to build a Christian way of life that stands as an island of sanctity and stability amid the high tide of liquid modernity,"[23] and near the end of the book, he says that the aim of his option is precisely not "to save the world but for no other reason than that we love Him and know that we need a community and an ordered way of life to serve Him fully."[24] However, the most revealing passage is:

> We faithful orthodox Christians didn't ask for internal exile from a country we thought was our own, but that's where we find ourselves…. Losing political power might just be the thing that saves the church's soul. Ceasing to believe that the fate of the American Empire is in our hands frees us to put them to work for the Kingdom of God in our own little shires.[25]

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[16] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xv.
[17] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 93–94.
[18] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 236.
[19] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 2.
[20] John Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2010), 11.
[21] Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 12; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 2.1.
[22] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 15.
[23] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 54.
[24] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 241.
[25] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 99.

This reference to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (for the whole purpose of the story is for Bilbo to leave the comforts of home and go on a necessary mission[26]), along with the phrase "we faithful orthodox Christians" in "internal exile from a country we thought was our own," reveal how very different his notion of the Church's existence is from that of the tradition. Dreher cautions that we cannot even count on our churches as places of refuge anymore as they too have been overtaken by the powers of secularization.[27] Dreher uses the same image employed by an earlier group of elitist Christians, the Donatists, who spoke of the Church as Noah's ark, keeping "within itself the good water of baptism; it had kept out the defiling waters of the world."[28] Similarly, Dreher writes of the Church as Ark and Wellspring; however, the image of wellspring is not indicating spilling out into the world but instead the Ark's self-cleansing nature:

> The church, then, is both Ark and Wellspring—and Christians must live in both realities. God gave us the Ark of the church to keep us from drowning in the raging flood. But He also gave us the church as a place to drown our old selves symbolically in the water of baptism, and to grow in new life, nourished by the never-ending torrent of His grace.[29]

The parallels between Dreher's ecclesiology and how the Church ought to engage in society with earlier Donatist thought is another reason to look for answers within the work of Augustine. The understanding that the Church is on continual pilgrimage this side of eternity is a prominent theme in Augustine's work. Ultimately, the contention to be made here is that because Dreher's option contains a narrow ecclesiology, it is *not* an option for Christians.

COSMIC ECCLESIA—BOOMERANG DYNAMICS

Parts of Augustine's metaphysics may be found in nearly all of his texts; to attempt to explain Christian existence apart from its underlying reality, for him, simply does not make sense. Thus, I follow the same pattern here, primarily utilizing *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Examination of this text has a double effect for the purposes of this discussion. First, it paints a picture of Augustine's ecclesiology understood in its broadest, indeed, cosmological sense. For, as Fr. David

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[26] Rod Dreher, "Building the Shire," from *The American Conservative*, March 20, 2018, www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/building-the-shire/. Dreher uses this image for the Church's interaction with society in this article.
[27] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 9.
[28] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 216.
[29] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 238.

Meconi explains, the Church is the *telos* of creation for Augustine,[30] a reading supported by the trajectories of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (*Gn. litt*. 13.28.56, 13.34.65),[31] the *Confessions* (*conf*. 13.32.47–13.38.53),[32] and the *City of God* (*ciu.* 22.29–30),[33] all three works ending with the perfection of creation in ecclesial communion, the eternal sabbath. Second, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* articulates the dynamics by which the individual human person grows to maturity within this cosmic community. Of particular importance is that, in Augustine's understanding, community and individual are formed to perfection in the Word and reach maturity by their conforming union with the Word.

For Augustine, the life of every creature is meant to imitate the Word's turn within the trinitarian dynamics, which Edmund Hill likens to the flight pattern of a boomerang.[34] Describing this pattern is particularly important for this discussion as, for Augustine, the Christian's participation in the liturgy and subsequent engagement in political life is its mirror expression. While maintaining that all of creation, together in harmony, is meant to travel along this same pattern, he is careful not to reduce creation to one glob of created existence by noting that each created being follows this pattern in its own way: "While God abides in himself, he swings everything whatever that comes from him back to himself…so that every creature might find in him the final terminus and goal for its nature, not to be what he is, but to find in him the place of rest in which to preserve what by nature it is in itself" (*Gn. litt*. 4.34).

It is important to note here that Augustine is not engaging in sheer philosophical speculation, but rather he is exegeting the first account of creation as related in the first chapter of Genesis. More specifically, he understands himself to be exegeting its literal sense vis-à-vis its figural meaning (*Gn. litt.* 1.34). Accordingly, Augustine maintains that when it comes to understanding how God undertook the act of creation, Genesis is teaching us how creation is a harmonious act of the Trinity (*Gn. litt.* 1.6.12–1.7.13). This is seen most clearly in his explanation of what he calls the "creational formula" (*Gn. litt.* 2.12):

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[30] David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 33, 183–184.

[31] Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002).

[32] Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012). This is the culmination of John C. Cavadini's "Eucharistic exegesis" of *The Confessions*. See John C. Cavadini, "Eucharistic Exegesis in Augustine's Confessions," in *Visioning Augustine* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 198–200.

[33] Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, Modern Library Edition, 1993); see also 20.16.

[34] Edmund Hill, trans., *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* in *On Genesis* (New York: New City Press, 2002), 260, n. 34.

"And God said, Let it be made…And thus it was made…And God saw that it was good" (*Gn. litt.* 2.14). On Augustine's understanding, the literal meaning behind the text describes three "movements" in creation. The first of these is "when we hear, 'And God said, Let it be made,' we understand that it was in the Word of God that it should be made." The second is characterized by the texts which read "and thus it was made," by which "we understand that the creature on being made did not overstep the limits of its kind prescribed for it in the Word of God." Finally, when "we hear, 'And God saw that it was good,' we understand, not that in the kindness and courtesy of his Spirit it pleased him as something known after it had been made, but rather that in that same goodness where it had pleased him that it should be made, it pleased him that it should remain made" (*Gn. litt.* 2.14). In all of this, Augustine is careful to hold together the Trinitarian dimension of the act of creation with a Logocentric dimension; creation itself being a Trinitarian activity, and the locus of created existence within the Trinitarian life being more specifically in the Word (*Gn. litt.* 1.4.9–1.5.11, 2.12). This is important to notice as when the pivot is made to examining Augustine's understanding of salvation, i.e., *re*-creation,[35] the same dynamics persist.

Accompanying these Trinitarian and Logocentric dynamics of the act of creation is Augustine's understanding of the growth or the development of all creation, undergirded by two interrelated concepts, that of *rationes seminales* and the accompanying triad of *measure, number,* and *weight*. These concepts appear as Augustine attempts to reconcile the two seemingly disparate accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 (*Gn. litt.* 5.1.1–3),[36] the latter suggesting that God created all things simultaneously and the former a gradual unfolding (*Gn. litt.* 4.52).[37] In addition, these concepts enable Augustine to hold in tension the individual and communal aspects of creation in harmony with one another, each individual creature coming into existence with its own specific nature and place within the entirety of creation (*Gn. litt.* 4.12.22) and in an imperfect manner (*Gn. litt.* 1.4,9).

The imperfection mentioned by Augustine does not mean deficiency or distortion, but instead an immaturity (*Gn. litt.* 1.11), i.e. things come into existence in "seed form" (*Gn. litt.* 5.23.44–45), con-

[35] Augustine often speaks of creation as recreation. See, for example, s. 260D.2 in *Sermons III/7.* trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993).
[36] See also *Gn. litt.* 5.3.5; 5.19; 5.11, 27, 5.23.44–45.
[37] Augustine here justifies his claim based upon the Book of Sirach 18:1, which Augustine relates as reading: "he created all things simultaneously together;" cf. *Biblia Sacra Vulgata,* Editio quinta, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007). My assumption is that Augustine is following a translation similar or identical to that of the Vulgate which reads: *qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul*.

taining within them the plan of life specific to their nature which Augustine refers to as *rationes seminales* (*Gn. litt.* 1.17, cf. 5.9). Augustine finds a biblical warrant for this philosophical concept, making a connection to a passage from the Book of Wisdom (11:20) which reads: "You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight" (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7).[38] In this way, Augustine gives the idea of *rationes seminales* a Christian character and, moreover, one in which he sees the action of the Trinity at play, roughly associating *measure* with the Father, *number* with the Son, and *weight* with the Holy Spirit (*Gn. litt.* 4.8-9). Augustine's language concerning these three aspects parallels the "creational formula" discussed above. The Father thus gives *measure* by "setting a limit to everything" in the Word (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7). Next, whereas he associated the "and thus it was made" with the Word, taking place within the Word so as not to exceed its limits, here he describes *number* as "giving everything its specific form" (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7). Finally, whereas in the "creational formula" God's seeing that the thing created was good was attributed to the Spirit, who communicates the power of God to the creature in order that once created "it should remain made," here *weight* is described as "drawing everything to rest and stability" (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7). In order to hold the individual, communal, and chronological dimensions together, Augustine explains that although the *rationes seminales* are simultaneously created, each individual creature appears at the moment pre-ordained by divine Providence (*Gn. litt.* 6.3.4)[39] and afterward is guided along by that same Providence, the Word constantly calling back (*Gn. litt.* 1.4.9) to himself all things so that the boomerang trajectory might be followed by all in order that they might each reach full maturity and perfection according to its own unique *measure, number,* and *weight* (*Gn. litt.* 5.10–11).

What we have here in the thought of Augustine is quite literally a cosmic understanding of the Church meant to harmoniously unite the entirety of created existence in one constant hymn of thankful praise to the Creator from the beginning. In his exposition on Psalm 148 he summarizes verses 1–5 saying: "Praise him, all you angels; praise him, all you his powers. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you stars and light. You heavens of heavens, praise him, and let the waters that

[38] Augustine uses this triad often in his work. See, for example, Augustine of Hippo, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity* (hereafter *ench.*), 11, in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005).

[39] This understanding of Augustine's comes out most clearly in his exegesis of the Genesis 2 telling of the creation of Adam and Eve, where he comments: "So there can be no doubt that this account of the man being molded from the mud of the earth, and a wife being formed for him from his side, does not belong to the creating of all things simultaneously…but to that divine work which is continuing now through the ages as they unroll, at which he is working until now."

are above the heavens praise the name of the Lord" (*en. Ps.* 148.6).[40] Why this praise coming from the rational and irrational creatures mentioned by the psalmist, Augustine rhetorically asks: "The psalmist responds, *He spoke, and they were made; he gave a command, and they were created*. There is nothing remarkable about the works praising the artificer, nothing remarkable in things that are made praising their maker, nothing to surprise us if a creature praises its creator" (*en. Ps.* 148.7). In short, by imitating the pattern of the Word's turn, the entire cosmos joins in an unending harmonious eucharistic hymn of thankful praise through the beauty of their individual and collective existence which "is like a voice that they raise to confess God" as Creator (*en. Ps.* 148.15).[41]

Within this *cosmic ecclesia,* the human family, and indeed, each human person is meant to occupy a very unique place. Properly occupying this place within the cosmos thus makes the individual an exemplary human creature. On a general level, this unique status is most basically understood as that of being a bridge creature, uniting the visible things God has made to the invisible, so that all creatures might take their rightful place within the cosmic body of worship (*en. Ps.* 148.3).[42] Augustine says "all these things the Almighty has made, joining the highest and the lowest by the ones in the middle, and arranging all that he has created in appropriate places and times" (*s.* 214.2).[43] And this is perfectly fitting, as according to their *measure* (using "measure" as we saw it used by Augustine above), each and every human person is created as a composite being, consisting of body and soul (*Gn. litt.* 6.19.30), and impressed upon with the *imago Dei*, the image itself understood by Augustine to be Trinitarian (*Gn. litt.* 3.22.34, 3.19.29).

The final two concepts within the triad of *measure, number,* and *weight*, then, explain how it is that each creature grows to full maturity in accordance with their *measure*. With regard to *number*, Augustine writes that "there is a numbering of the spirit's passions (*affectionum animi*) and powers (*virtutum*), by which it is helped to pull itself together, pulling away from the deformity of folly, and towards the form of wisdom" (*Gn. litt.* 4.4.8). That Augustine associates *number* here with the soul's passions (*affectionum*) and powers (*virtutum*)[44] is significant. In the *City of God,* Augustine tells us that affections, when

[40] In *Expositions on the Psalms*, vol. 6, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001).

[41] See also Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, 5.1.1, 7.13.19, 10.6.8–10.6.9. These various passages express Augustine's understanding of creation as "doxologically deiform," explained by David Meconi, *The One Christ*, 8.

[42] See also, *en. Ps.* 148.10 and 148.15 in *Expositions on the Psalms*, vol. 6.

[43] In *Sermons III/6*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993).

[44] On the terminology used here, see Michel René Barnes, "Augustine's Last Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008): 223–234; I am aware of Augustine's

"arising…from the love of what is good and from a holy charity…pass under the name of virtues" (*ciu.* 14.9), a description coinciding with his definition of the cardinal virtues as different manifestations of charity or love (*mor.* 1.15.25).[45] Moreover, a creature's *number* is meant to function so as to help it "pull itself together…towards the form of wisdom." This parallels Augustine's description of the function of virtue in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, where he writes that virtues help put the soul "into proper shape" (*Gn. litt.* 7.6.9). It thus makes sense to associate *number* with the Son as done above; for virtue is here said *to form*, and above we saw that Augustine understands all creatures to *be formed* to perfection in the Word, i.e. the Son, both pre-existent and incarnate (*mor.* 1.13.22, 1.16.27). Thus, the exercise of virtue by the human individual is *thoroughly participatory* and can be understood as conforming us to the Word within the Word (*mor.* 1.16.27). Consequently, by growing in virtue, the individual manifests the intended purpose of the human person in the cosmos: becoming an exemplary instance of the human creature.

Number must not be isolated from *weight*, associated with the Holy Spirit, who in the "creational formula" is said to "draw everything to rest and stability" (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7). To attribute such activity to the Holy Spirit is appropriate for Augustine as he says that charity is like the glue that binds us to God (*en. Ps.* 62.17),[46] and for him such a unity can only be effected by the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (*s.* 34.3).[47] It is important to note that both *weight* and *number* have been characterized by love, the former being the very indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the latter associated with the conforming of the creature to the Word, i.e., the Son of God. The reason for this is nothing less than the intimate working of the Trinity, a triune communion of Divine Persons we are told can be understood as nothing less than love itself (1 John 4:7-8).

Talk of the Holy Spirit as the charity which binds us to God calls for consideration of the communal dimension of human existence. As Augustine understands it, not only does the charity of the Holy Spirit glue us to God but also to one another. Commenting on Psalm 30, he writes: "Charity ensures the close connection of the parts; these or-

usage of *virtus* to refer to the power of the Holy Spirit as Barnes discusses. However, given the contextual use and the description of its effects paralleling what he explicitly states of virtue in the same work, this reading is justified.

[45] Augustine of Hippo, *The Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life* in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* vol. 56, trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966).

[46] In *Expositions on the Psalms*, vol. 3, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001).

[47] In *Sermons* III/2, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990).

ganic links hold them together in unity; unity fosters charity; and charity brings us all to glory" (*en. iii. Ps.* 30.1).[48] There are two things to note here. First, we see how the twofold command of love of God and neighbor is not a result of the Fall but rather the manner we were created to exist in from the beginning. Second, this charity given by the Holy Spirit and binding the human family together is meant to be their mutual *weight*, drawing them into the life of God communally. Thus, not in isolation, but together with one another, the human family from the beginning was meant to assume the posture of the Son in unity with the Son in singing an endless eucharistic hymn to God the Father as a response to the gift of life. This understanding comes out most clearly in *The Excellence of Marriage*, where Augustine begins with a consideration of the communal nature of the human family saying that "every human being is part of the human race, and human nature is a social entity, and has naturally the great benefit and power of friendship. For this reason, 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" (*b. coniug.* 1.1).[49] He goes on to explain that the reason we are told that Eve was drawn from the side of Adam is "a sign of the strength of their union. For those who walk together, and look ahead together to where they are walking, do so at each other's side" (*b. coniug.* 1.1). It is perhaps worth noting that this bond is not simply sentimental but eschatologically oriented, containing a view towards a common end. It also suggests that exemplarity, i.e., directing one another to our proper end by cooperating harmoniously in the dynamics articulated above, is an idea inherent in communal existence for Augustine.[50]

Even prior to the Fall, Augustine thinks of God caring and cultivating the human family in the garden of Eden sacramentally. This is seen especially in his description of the tree of life: "So then the tree of life also was Christ…. [I]ndeed God did not wish the man to live in Paradise without the mysteries of spiritual things being presented to him in bodily form. So then in the other trees he was provided with nourishment, in this one with a sacrament" (*Gn. litt.* 8.48, 11.32.42). Thus, even in the beginning Augustine understands the need for the human family to partake of Christ sacramentally; this is simply God's way of relating to the human family through history (*Gn. litt.* 8.5.9).[51]

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[48] In *Expositions on the Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

[49] Augustine of Hippo, *The Excellence of Marriage* in *Marriage and Virginity: The Excellence of Marriage, Holy Virginity, The Excellence of Widowhood, Adulterous Marriages, Continence*, trans. Ray Kearney (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

[50] In fact, Augustine writes that creatures mutually interact to direct one another to their Creator in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 7.47.

[51] See also, *Gn. litt.* 12.17, where Augustine explicitly writes "sacrament of the Old Testament."

ECCLESIA PEREGRINA

The cosmic understanding of reality constitutes what we might call "perfect politics" for Augustine and thus leads to a drastically different understanding of the Church's political role in society than that which is found in Dreher's option. This is because, for Augustine, God's purpose for creation after the Fall *does not change*. Along with the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Augustine fully affirms that "the world was created for the sake of the Church" (*Catechism*, no. 760)[52] because it is as a member of the Church that we are united to one another in Christ, the Word through whom, with whom, and in whom every creature was meant to exist and reach perfection from the beginning (*ench.* 61). This is precisely why Rowan Williams rightly notes that the Church is the true body politic for Augustine.[53] What changes, instead, is the manner in which God's intended purpose for creation is accomplished.

Prior to the Fall, the human family would have grown to full maturity (individually and communally) (*b. coniug.* 2.2), imitating the boomerang trajectory of the Word's turn by the help of God's grace in a free and easy way (*ench.* 106). In a postlapsarian world, the trajectory does not change: our ability to stay on course does. The rupture in our relationship with God and the introduction of sin eating away at our substance like a disease causes us to become less *weighty*. Thus, instead of traveling easily into increased unity with the Son, we fall towards nothingness (*doctr. chr.* 1.32.35),[54] away from unity with God and one another. The central issue here for Augustine is original sin, a disease passed on by generation and not by imitation (*nupt. et conc.* 2.45).[55] The communal nature of humanity now comes into play negatively. Because of original sin, from the very moment of our conception, we are implicated in a web of interconnected brokenness.[56] This web of brokenness results in Augustine's idea of the human family as

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[52] See also, *s.* 267.3 in *Sermons III/7*.

[53] Rowan Williams. "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God," in *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, and Craig Hovey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 735.

[54] Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

[55] Augustine of Hippo, *Marriage and Desire* in *Answer to the Pelagians II*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998).

[56] Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience," February 6, 2013, w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130206.html. Here the relational ramifications of original sin are emphasized: "Being human is a relationship….[S]in is the distortion or destruction of the relationship with God….Once the fundamental relationship is spoilt, the other relational poles are also jeopardized or destroyed: sin ruins relationships, thus it ruins everything because we are relational."

the *massa damnata*; all born destined to die as the result of original sin (*ench.* 25.99, 28.107).

Despite the harsh terminology, Augustine maintains that each and every human person is a gift from God regardless of the historical circumstances of its creation and therefore is inherently good (*b. coniug.* 9.9, 16.18).[57] There is a tension here which Augustine explains as follows: "If human nature were something evil, it ought not to be saved, and if there were nothing evil in it, it would not need to be saved" (*nupt. et conc.* 2.21.36). Thus, God remains patient and tolerant with the human family, continually calling this collective prodigal back to himself throughout history, educating it the way we would educate a child; as Augustine says "The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from the earthly to heavenly things, and from things visible to the invisible" (*ciu.* 10.14).

There are two elements to note in this last quote that form the basis of the politics of salt and light that will be articulated in this last section of the paper. First, the educational journey of the human family through history points to the state of the Church this side of eternity as *ecclesia peregrina* (pilgrim church), and second, talk of moving "from things visible to the invisible" alludes to Augustine's understanding of what a sacrament is (*cat. rud.* 26.50).[58] As we will see, both elements demonstrate continuity with Augustine's idea of "perfect politics" from the discussion of the *cosmic ecclesia* above and thereby how for him it is through the Church that the right order of creation is reestablished and thus drawn into its intended communion with God.

It is best to treat the sacramental element first as it makes most clear the interconnection between these two elements; the sacramental is given in a type of pedagogical sequence by God over time. Augustine maintains a very broad understanding of the type of things that function sacramentally within God's economy of salvation. Yet, precisely because of the interconnection of all reality, sacraments retain some form of efficacy even though they differ in intensity. Thus, for Augustine, all of creation functions sacramentally, each creature signifying its dependence upon God for its existence (*conf.* 7.10.16). Consequently, humans, too, have such a sacramental function. I argue that this is precisely how Augustine understands the concept of exemplarity. As explained above, the exemplary human creature is the virtuous human creature, the one whose participation in the life of Christ has matured through increased conformity and unity with him. On this reading, virtuous actions manifest the life of Christ within and thereby

[57] Augustine repeats the teaching in *nupt. et conc.* 1.1.

[58] Augustine of Hippo, *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, trans. Raymond Canning (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006).

make that life present to the world (*ep. Io. tr.* 8.1).[59] This undergirds Augustine's notion of the Christian's engagement in political life, but the extent to which we can so function depends upon the degree of healing we experience.

What is needed first, then, is that we experience the salvation purchased for us by Christ, and for Augustine, this is experienced sacramentally throughout the history of salvation. Recalling that for Augustine, the Fall did not change God's plan for creation, he speaks of the Israelites as members of the Church, writing:

> Now by Church, brothers, you must understand not only those who began to be saints after the Lord's advent and nativity, but all who have ever been saints belong to the same Church. You can't say that our father Abraham does not belong to us, just because he lived before Christ was born of the virgin….[A]fter all, the apostle says that we are the children of Abraham (Gal 3:7) by imitating Abraham's faith (*s.* 4.11).[60]

If we further remember that Augustine understands this cosmic body, under the principle of *rationes seminales*, to grow as one body, with each creature appearing chronologically in accordance with Providence, we see that the sacramental economy associated with the Old Testament Church tracks analogously to the reception of the sacraments by an individual. Thus, the first sacrament to appear is circumcision, which Augustine parallels with baptism (*nupt. et conc.* 2.11.24), and later the people of God will receive the manna in the desert as a prefigurement of the Eucharist (*Io. eu. tr.* 26.11).[61] Moreover, Augustine likewise speaks of the revealed law and word of God the people received as having a sacramental quality, a type of food nourishing them on their pilgrimage (*s.* 4.10). All of these sacraments receive their efficacy from the way they prefigure the sacramental economy of the New Testament and by the faith in Christ they symbolize (*c. Faust.* 19.13–14).[62] We saw above how Augustine had referred to the fallen human family as the *massa damnata*. Here we see how God changes this, forming for himself a people, a body, giving form and order where there had been deformity.

This process of formation reaches an apex on the cross, where what had been germinating within the soil of history is now drawn forth from the side of the sleeping Christ, making visible the new mother

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[59] In *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008).
[60] In *Sermons III/1*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992).
[61] In *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009).
[62] Augustine of Hippo, *Answer to Faustus a Manichean*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007).

destined to become the mother of all humanity, the Church (*Gn. adu. Man.* 2.23.37).[63] Thus, just as Eve had once been drawn from the side of the sleeping Adam, marking the beginning of a united human family, now the Church born from Christ's side makes the reestablishing of that unity possible (*s.* 192.2). And, once again as before, the communion of this pilgrim people is accomplished by way of sacraments, the blood and water gushing forth from Christ's side signifying baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments which form the Church (*s.* 218.14).[64] This is the formation of the *totus Christus*, the concept by which Augustine will time and again speak of the Church as the body of Christ united to its head, forming two in one flesh (*en. Ps.* 37.6), referring to it as a great sacrament (*Gn. litt.* 1.1.1). For Augustine this marks the dawn of the new creation, as seen in his referring to Holy Saturday as Christ's sabbath, a "holy vacation" (*sanctae vacationis*) taken after accomplishing the work of re-creation (*Gn. litt*. 4.11.21), and his comparison of the newly baptized to the light God calls into creation in Genesis 1 (*s*. 260D.1). Recalling again the concept of *rationes seminales*, Augustine understands this Church to be destined to grow until it encompasses the whole earth, inheriting the mandate given to the human family at the very beginning—to fill the earth (Genesis 1:28)—so that by the power of the Holy Spirit all might be one in Christ, the Word of God, as intended from the beginning (*s.* 267.3).[65] This is precisely why Augustine was so frustrated with the isolationist and elitist mentality shown by the Donatists[66]—and why we must resist the same mentality today.

The manner by which the Church grows brings us to consider the nature of the Church as *ecclesia peregrina* and finally to a consideration of Augustine's politics of salt and light, as the two are directly related. In Augustine's corpus, "pilgrimage" functions metaphorically for the individual and communal journey Christians experience as they make their way toward unity with God.[67] This metaphor reveals the understanding above that, contrary to Dreher, the Church has never understood itself to be at home in any nation but aliens, experiencing "the sorrow of the exile" and "stirred by longing for [our] true country and its founder, [our] blissful God" (*trin.* 4.P.1).[68] As pilgrims, Christians have no permanent dwelling (Hebrews 11:13–14, 13:14, 1 Peter 1:1, 1:17, 2:11). Instead, the Church functions as the tent we dwell in

[63] Augustine of Hippo, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002).
[64] See also, *en. Ps*. 40.10 in *Expositions on the Psalms vol. 2*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).
[65] See also, *s.* 268.4.
[66] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 216.
[67] See e.g. *en. Ps*. 41.1 (individual) and *en. Ps*. 42.2 (communal).
[68] Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

as we make our journey home,[69] an image used by Benedict as well (RB 22–24, 39). To live in such a way, Raniero Cantalamessa reminds us, is precisely what it means to be a "parishioner"; the word "parish" meaning temporary dwelling-place, derived from the Greek *paroikia* and "parishioners" from the Greek *paroikoi* and carrying the connotation of an alien citizen.[70] Thus, Charles Mathewes rightly notes that Augustine's approach to political engagement is essentially parochial.[71] For Augustine, parishes function as local units of the universal Church, forming smaller branches of one the one large "*familia Dei.*"[72] It is in this family that human persons are drawn into the dynamics of trinitarian life through the double working of Spirit and Word in accordance with the *measure*, *number*, and *weight* dynamics of Augustine's sacramental metaphysics. This family grows quantitatively, through the sacrament of baptism as members are incorporated into Christ's life by sharing in his death and resurrection (*s.* 228B.1), the Holy Spirit binding or gluing us to Christ (*en. Ps.* 62.17), and qualitatively, as members are conformed and united to him in the Eucharist.[73]

Anticipating the Second Vatican Council, the Eucharistic liturgy is, for Augustine, the source and summit of Christian life (*Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 10). On his understanding, through baptism, Christians do not simply become members of a social group but are united to Christ's very person. Here we must remember that to be united to Christ, the Word of God, constitutes "perfect politics" for Augustine. He reminds us of this in the *City of God*, writing that where the people do not give God due worship, i.e. do justice to God, there can be no true *polis*, for true justice cannot obtain among a people with improperly ordered loves (*ciu.* 2.21, 14.28).[74] Thus, to be united to Christ and so enter the dynamics of Trinitarian life is what properly orders the Christian's loves, which is why this identification is so adamantly affirmed:

> Let us congratulate ourselves then and give thanks for having been made not only Christians but Christ. Do you understand, brothers and sisters, the grace of God upon us; do you grasp that? Be filled with wonder, rejoice and be glad; we have been made Christ. For, if he is the head, and we the members, then he and we are the whole

[69] See e.g., *en. Ps*. 41.9 and *en. Ps*. 42.5.
[70] Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Eucharist: Our Sanctification*, trans. Frances Lonergan Villa (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 96.
[71] Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2010), 51.
[72] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 189.
[73] This language of the church growing "quantitatively" in baptism and "qualitatively" in the Eucharist is taken from Cantalamessa, *The Eucharist*, 16.
[74] The ordering of love is the proper work of the virtue of justice for Augustine, see *mor.*, 1.24.44.

> man…The fullness of Christ, then, is head and members. What is that, head and members? Christ and the Church (*Io. e. tr.* 21.8).

This transformation takes place most acutely in the Eucharistic liturgy. Time and again, he will implore the new members of the Church, the *infantes*, to take seriously who it is that they encounter in the Eucharist, Christ. The linguistic imagery he uses here is important, as it forms the basis of why Augustine understands it to be necessary for Christians to engage in the politics of salt and light. Thus, in Sermon 272 he tells them:

> So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply, Amen, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, what you see, is the body of Christ, and you answer, Amen. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that Amen true.[75]

Notice the language of exchange here. Encountered by the Eucharistic presence of Christ, the Christian assents to the identification in a twofold manner as it were, once to Christ and once to the unity established by the reception of the sacrament. Thus, by receiving the Eucharist, the Christian takes on the burden of sharing in Christ's salvific mission in the world, the liturgical celebration indicating exactly what this means for their life.

Augustine understands gathering at the liturgical celebration to be inherently formational in the Christocentric sense explained above for the Christian both communally and individually. This formation is twofold in each of its components corresponding with Augustine's writing of Christ as both sacrament (*sacramentum*) "for the inner man" and exemplar (*exemplum*) "for the outer one" (*trin.* 4.1.6).[76] In accordance with the explanation of Augustine's metaphysics above, this means that the human exemplar is always only a secondary exemplar by way of participation in the life of Christ, the primary exemplar.[77] Therefore, from the first person perspective, it is Christ who enables

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[75] See also *s.* 234.2 where the same language is used.

[76] In this passage the use of *exemplum* refers to his external actions, specifically his death and resurrection, while *sacramentum* refers to spiritual death and resurrection, i.e., of the inner man. This latter point might seem to invalidate my use of this pair here, but, because it is precisely through the sacraments that individuals participate in Christ's overcoming of death and rise to new life, the idea is a valid extension of Augustine's concepts.

[77] See, e.g., *en. Ps.* 39.6. Here Augustine cautions that while there are exemplary figures to be imitated in the Church, those who imitate these exemplary lives "must also remember from whom those in front received the strength to go ahead like that, and in him they must hope. Let them imitate their betters, yes, but put their trust only in him by whose gift those leaders are what they are."

one to be an exemplar, while from the second person perspective, the life of the individual exemplary Christian is only intelligible in relation to Christ. Accordingly, he refers to these gatherings as the school of Christ (*s.* 270.1), another phrase reiterated verbatim by Benedict in RB (45). The formation received at the liturgical celebration is multilayered, targeting and forming the Christian imagination in every layer. First, the very materials used in the Eucharistic offering, symbolize the unity of the people, the one bread requiring many grains and the wine made up from the juice of many grapes (*s.* 272). Prior to their reception of these gifts in sacramental form, the members are nourished by scripture, allowing Christ to teach them what it means to live as members of his body.[78] Moreover, united as the one voice of Christ, the entire congregation proclaims the scripture as they sing a psalm (*en. iii. Ps.* 30.1).[79] Finally, they join Christ on the altar as the Eucharistic sacrifice of the *Totus Christus*. In this act, the Church learns to offer itself as a sacrifice in, with, and through Christ as head (*ciu.* 10.20) by the power of the Holy Spirit, who bakes the members (the various grains) into the one bread and presses them (as grapes) into one cup (*s.* 229.1, *s.* 272).

Two additional points can be made regarding the *sacramentum*/*exemplum* tandem. First, the formation received by Christians in the liturgy is sacramental; at each step of the way, the members are united to the head to engage in the right worship of God and thereby brought into right relationship with God. Thus, our integration into the life of the Church, experienced most intensely in the Eucharistic liturgy, is a *re*-integration into the Word in whom we are to be formed to perfection as detailed above (*ciu.* 10.3). This formation demands much from the imagination of its participants. They are asked, as it were, to see reality anew in order to see that God's purpose for the human family is unity in Christ (as in the images of grain and grapes) and to live so that this unity might be realized. This leads to the second element. The *necessary* consequence of this sacramental formation is that Christians receive a moral formation, a formation in the life of virtue. In other words, for Augustine, a life lived in imitation of Christ's *exemplum* is the external expression of participation in his *sacramentum* (*s.* 229E.3).[80]

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[78] See, e.g., *s.* 25A.1 and *s.* 33A.4.

[79] See also *s.* 15A.1.

[80] Here Augustine exhorts his listeners to "consider Christ's resurrection, dearly beloved; since just as his passion signified our old life, so his resurrection is the sacrament, the mode, of the new life….The old, which you lived so badly, has been buried; let the new life arise. Live a good life; live in such a way that you may live; live in such a way that when you die, you don't die." Living in such a manner, Augustine goes onto add in paragraph four of the same sermon, is enabled by being nourished with the life of Christ through Scripture and the Eucharist.

The reason for this is threefold. First and foremost is because, as we saw above, Christ, the Incarnate Word, is virtue for Augustine, and thus by sacramentally participating in his life, Christians participate in his virtue (*ciu.* 10.3).[81] Second, it is within the body of Christ that the Holy Spirit dwells, and without the grace of the Holy Spirit, living the life of virtue characterized centrally by the twofold command to love God and neighbor is impossible (*s.* 270.3). In these first two elements, Christians participate in the double action of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Third, participation in the very mechanics and symbols of the liturgy teaches Christians what it means to live a life of virtue. At bottom, for Augustine, the life of virtue is a life of Eucharistic praise; in other words, it is an extension of the liturgy itself (*s.* 33.5).

THE POLITICS OF SALT AND LIGHT

Having been formed in this way, Christians are then sent out into the world (*ite missa est*) as sacramental exemplars of the life of Christ. In living exemplary lives of virtue, Christians make Christ's presence known and felt throughout the world. Thereby Christians engage in the politics of salt and light. And more to it, having communicated so intimately in the divine life, Christians ought to desire nothing less as they ought to share God's intention that all be gathered into unity with Christ. Therefore, as Christians travel from liturgy to liturgy, existentially imitating the eternal exemplum of the Word's turn, Augustine implores them to whisk others along the road of love (*doctr. chr.* 1.29.30). In fact, there is a certain sense wherein failing to live a life of virtue constitutes an abuse of the sacraments (*s.* 223.1), and this in two ways. First, the life of virtue, as a life of love, cannot separate the love of God and neighbor (*s.* 229N.1). Relatedly, to separate from the world grasps at the prerogative of God, who *only at the end of time* will separate the good from the bad. These two elements form the sharpest theological critique of Dreher's option. Augustine repeatedly used these in his refutation of the Donatists, most often by way of the parable of the wheat and the tares, thus making an explicit connection to the Eucharistic unity of many grains gathered into one loaf (*s.* 47.6).[82] For Augustine, for someone to receive the Eucharistic Christ,

[81] This participatory conception of Christian virtue in Augustine's thought is missed by Jennifer A. Herdt in her discussion on Augustine's understanding of moral formation in the liturgy in "Augustine and the Liturgical Pedagogy of Virtue," in William Werpehowski and Kathryn Getek Soltis, eds., *Virtue and the Moral Life: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). This is the reason Augustine reserves the life of true virtue for Christians, but because this is missed by Herdt, she sees Augustine as being "indispensable" for our understanding of virtue yet "also dangerous."

[82] See also, *Answer to the Letter of Parmenian* (*c. ep. Parm.*) 1.13.20 in *The Donatist Controversy I*, Maureen Tilley and Boniface Ramsey, trans. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2019).

the sacrament of unity, and to "insist on division" is to receive it as "testimony against themselves," (*s.* 229.2) regardless of the maltreatment they receive from the world (*en. Ps.* 36.5).

Therefore, Christians must not retreat. Augustine instead enumerates three responsibilities required of them in their engagement with the world, all of which he exemplifies:

> As for us, we say that the one who does not do evil, and does not consent to the one who does it, and rebukes the one who does it, lives as one who is firm and whole in the midst of the wicked, like grain in the midst of chaff (*c. ep. Parm.* 2.21.40).

Peter Brown describes the three responsibilities of the Christian living in the world as growing in holiness, coexisting in community with sinners, and fraternal correction.[83] Growth in holiness has already been described as participation in the sacramental life of the Church extended by virtuous living. The last two responsibilities complete the politics of salt and light. The second of the three responsibilities is what Augustine calls tolerance and is to be exercised in three areas of life. The first area of tolerance is the self. Augustine reminds his Church family that they must tolerate others "because perhaps you have been put up with….And who, anyway, is always good? It will be easier for God to find that you are bad even now, if he investigates you carefully, than for you to find that you have always been good" (*s.* 47.6). In short, no one this side of eternity is completely holy and virtuous (*s.* 15.5), a reality that Augustine readily admits of himself to his congregation in response to Donatists' attacks on his character (*en. iii. Ps.* 36.19–20).[84] We must, then, first be self-tolerant, patiently cooperating with God's work in forming us (*de pat.* 8.8).[85]

The second and third areas are the Church and the world, areas not always easily distinguished. Through a concept that is particularly applicable today as numerous scandals rock the Church, Augustine reminds us that the Church is an *ecclesia permixta*. A concept borrowed from the Donatist Tyconius, Augustine says that this side of eternity, the good and the bad "are temporarily mixed up together and share the same sacraments" (*doct. chr.* 3.32.45). This is a reality Augustine repeatedly warns newly baptized Christians of. Exhorting them not to imitate Christians who do not live out the faith (for there is no such thing as nominal Christianity) (*s.* 15.1, *s.* 223.1), Augustine implores

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[83] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 218.

[84] Here Augustine exhorts the congregation to respond to slander with love: "Let them speak against us as they will, but let us love them even against their will."

[85] Augustine of Hippo, *Patience*, trans. Luanne Meagher, *Treatises on Various Subjects* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952).

the newly baptized to be examples that others can imitate (*s.* 228.2).[86] Christians will find themselves engaged in the same dynamics in the world at large, as this side of eternity, two cities travel through history alongside one another. The similarity in description between the *ecclesia permixta* and the relationship of the two cities is a reminder that, for Augustine, all of creation was in fact meant to be the Church (*ciu.* 1.35).

In great part, the work of Christians then, both individually and communally, is to be patiently tolerant with others in *imitatio Dei* (*de. pat.* 1.1), and intentionally act as "transfigurers of the world"[87] in *imitatio Christi* (*s.* 47.12). This is done through the politics of light (word and deed) and salt (transforming culture from within). The suggestion being made here is similar to that made by Charles Mathewes that Christians are to engage in a "war of semiotics,"[88] functioning as living signs via participation in the life of Christ whereby they carry out the work of fraternal correction by calling others to join in that very same life. The images of light and salt as used by Augustine makes this connection clear.

Two Augustinian images describe how a Christian functions as light in the world: *light* and *living sermon*. These images appear all over Augustine's corpus, so here I give one example of each. Speaking of Christians as the light of the world, Augustine tells his congregation:

> In fact, all human beings are lamps because they can be illuminated and put out, and they really are lamps when they are wise, shine and burn with the Spirit; while if they were burning and have gone out, they stink. The good lamps, you see, have persevered as servants of God, kept alight from the oil of his mercy, not from their own strength. God's freely-given grace, I mean, that is the oil in the lamps (*Io. eu. tr.* 23.3).

Before moving on, it is important to note how Augustine says that "all human beings" are potentially lamps. The second term, "living sermon," never appears in Augustine's corpus, but it is routinely implied. The clearest example is the following quote where he admonishes preachers to practice what they preach:

> But if anyone is unable to do both, let him say wisely what he does not say eloquently, rather than say eloquently what he says unwisely.

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[86] Here Augustine writes that for those who do not live out the faith, "the name of 'faithful' is just a mistake."

[87] I am borrowing this term from Robert Barron in *Bridging the Great Divide: Musings of a Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative Evangelical Catholic* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 249ff.

[88] Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace*, 52–53.

> If however, he cannot even do this, let him so conduct himself that he not only earns a reward for himself, but also gives an example to others, and so his manner of life can itself be a kind of eloquent sermon (*doct. chr.* 4.28–29.61).

Regarding these two images, three elements should be highlighted to connect them to what has come before. First, both of these images are participatory. Christians only become light by participating in the light of Christ (*Io. eu. tr.* 23.3)[89] and can only translate the word of God into action (to borrow a phrase from RB 35) and thereby become living sermons by attending carefully to the word of God.[90] Second, Augustine regularly associates these images with the life of virtue, speaking of the radiance of virtue (*s.* 4.7) and of how living out the scriptures is done through a life of virtue, respectively.[91] Third, Augustine understands these images rhetorically; such a life grabs the attention of others and asks them to attend to and consider what they see. He will even speak of the light of Christian life shouting out to the world with a joyful noise (*gaudentium sonitus*) (*en. Ps.* 65.2). Once again, expressing the continuity between the liturgy and day to day life, Augustine exhorts his listeners: "Just as you shout with joy in a way that God hears, so too you must play psalms in such a way that men and women see and hear you" by performing good works for the glory of God (*en. Ps.* 65.3).

Possidius makes it quite obvious that Augustine's life had such an impact on those around him,[92] but it is important for us to ask where we see such attention-grabbing activity in our world today. We see such activity wherever virtue is lived, and the works of mercy from Matthew 25 provide a good list. To offer a concrete and personal example, my wife and other members of the local St. Vincent de Paul Society group sacrifice their Saturday mornings to serve those in need, face to face, hand to hand, doing the type of work Augustine himself was known to do.[93] More to it, they do so in a way that intentionally participates in the loving presence of Christ, beginning their morning by gathering for Mass and by seeing the visits to their "neighbors in need" in terms of the group's spirituality that includes virtues that are

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[89] Just after the quote mentioned above, Augustine says: "So then, when he has also told the disciples, 'You are the light of the world,' to stop them from thinking they were being credited with something that was to be understood of Christ alone, and thus would the lamps be blown out by the wind of pride."

[90] See e.g., *s.* 15A.1: "To rejoice in God's praises, and to match God's praises by the way we live, is what we are admonished to do by what we have just been singing: *Exult, you just, in the Lord; praise is proper for the upright* (Ps. 33:1)."

[91] The clearest example of this is Augustine's treatment of the Decalogue in *s.* 33.5.

[92] Possidius of Calama, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, 15, 22, 58.

[93] Possidius of Calama, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, 37.

to be intentionally cultivated, such as humility, simplicity, gentleness, selflessness, and zeal.[94]

Turning to the image of salt, once again the image is driven principally by the life of virtue, most especially the virtue of fortitude which resists giving way in the face of misfortune (*mor.* 1.25.46). Because salt is only effective by way of direct contact, it imaginatively speaks to the need for the Christian to incarnate the life of Christ as members of his body in the world. What I have in mind here is the willingness Christians must have to get involved in the business of the fallen world by tolerating its injustice and putting their own holiness on the line in the hopes of converting some to a life of love just as Christ did. This is precisely the way Augustine explains the image of salt in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount:

> *But if the salt lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?* That is, if you through whom nations are to be seasoned—if I may use the expression—if through fear of temporal persecution you lose the kingdom of heaven, who will there be to root out error from you, since God has chosen you as the instruments to dissipate the errancy of others?...Not, therefore, is the one who suffers persecution trodden on by men, but the one who loses his savor by fearing persecution. Nothing but the inferior can be trampled on; but he is not inferior, however much he endures in his body on earth, who yet in spirit is rooted in heaven (*de s. dom.* 1.6.16).[95]

Echoes of what has already been said of being united to Christ's *sacramentum* ("who is yet in spirit rooted in heaven") and consequently following his *exemplum* of enduring the trials and temptations of life can be noted in this passage.

Augustine's discussion of the Christian judge further concretizes the need of Christians to remain involved in the activity of the world in the face of the threat it poses to one's growth in holiness, writing that despite the dangers inherent in such a position, the Christian will most certainly take up the role of the judge, considering it wickedness to abandon human society (*ciu.* 19.6). We know that Augustine functioned in such a capacity, and Peter Brown also mentions how he reached out to the wealthy members of society to support the Church.[96] Possidius would add Augustine's petitioning civil authorities on behalf of prisoners, his standing firm as Hippo was sacked in order to care for his congregation, and even his entering into the priesthood

[94] St. Vincent de Paul Society USA, "The Spirituality of the Home Visit."
[95] Augustine of Hippo, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John J. Jepson (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1948).
[96] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 187, 190.

itself, as examples (for he saw the priesthood as a risk to a virtuous life).[97]

All of these examples are still applicable for us today, and we could add the roles of lawyer, physician, journalist, business executive, truck driver, baker, farmer, and parent. The point is, there is no role in life that does not require Christian engagement in order that all occupations, "and the worlds they form" be transformed "from within."[98] The way Christians transform these roles and their attendant structures from within is by living a life of virtue, by doing so they both exemplify for the world (though in a way always mitigated by the presence of sin) what it would look like for Christ to take on these various roles and thereby make his life present to the world through these very same roles. Where and how exactly Christians do this has to be a continual process of discernment. I cannot tell a lawyer or an accountant what it looks like for them to do their jobs virtuously. As specialists in their own field, they must discern this through the virtue of prudence, which distinguishes "between that which ought to be sought and that which ought to be avoided" in accordance with the cosmic order of love articulated above, because "if prudence is lacking, none of the things we have spoken of can be accomplished" (*mor.* 1.24.45). By so living, the everyday life of the Christian becomes ascetic, for as they love others virtuously, they regain their *weight*, and are carried ever deeper into loving union with Christ (*number*), giving glory to God the Father (*measure*) in all they say and do thereby functioning as an exemplar of God's purpose for humanity (*en. Ps.* 65.3).

Yet, as the word asceticism implies, this life will not happen magically, nor will an hour a week suffice to transform us into the salt with which "the nations are to be seasoned." What is required is continual sacramental formation in the life of Christ. And so, I agree with Dreher that we must turn our homes into "domestic monasteries" wherein Scripture is a daily part of life and the lives of the saints are celebrated, studied, and imitated,[99] making its members exemplars for one another. That said, this particular aspect of Dreher's vision must be expanded in a way analogous to his entire project so as to be directed toward *engagement with* and not *estrangement from* the world. For the "domestic monastery" is not the residence of the monk, i.e., the one whose vocation the Church deems it appropriate to live in isolation from the world. Rather, the "domestic monastery" is the residence of the *laic* (to borrow a term from David Fagerberg),[100] the one whose

[97] Possidius of Calama, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, 29–30, 44–56, and 8, respectively.
[98] Barron, *Bridging the Great Divide*, 251.
[99] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 125.
[100] David W. Fagerberg, *On Liturgical Asceticism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 133–136, 145–146.

baptismal vocation it is to sanctify the secular realm (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 15).

One way to do this is for *laics* to make the text of *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* a central component of their domestic life. Aside from providing prayers for nearly every occasion in life from waking, going to work or school, and going to bed, this text is a treasure trove of blessings known as sacramentals, which "prepare us to receive the grace of the sacraments and help us to grow to be more like Christ."[101] The sacramentals sanctify every moment of the day by making countless objects of domestic life, from the home itself to our Christmas trees in accordance with the liturgical seasons, reminders of the continual presence of God's grace in our lives and thereby sacramentally form our vision.[102]

Here two specific examples might be given in order to demonstrate how these prayers and blessings might be creatively employed so as to more intentionally form *laics* for the mission of sanctifying the world. First, the text contains a blessing for gardens, making time spent cultivating God's creation a reminder of his continual care.[103] At the time of harvest, the family could take some of the fruits of the earth and work of their human hands to the poor, using the prayer of "Reparations for Sins against the Poor,"[104] thereby reinforcing the sacrificial and liturgical nature of this work of mercy. Second, and more simply yet more encompassing, the family might place a Holy Water font near the door, so that as members leave, they are both reminded of their baptism as they trace the sign of our faith upon their bodies, making them, literally, marked persons whose vocation it is to "be a blessing" for the world[105] through a life of self-sacrificing love.

The continual sacramental formation given by the use of the sacramentals is important for the final element to be noted here. That is, despite what some write, Augustine recognizes the potential for virtuous action outside the Church proper (i.e., existentially manifested in institutional form).[106] This a necessary consequence of his cosmic un-

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[101] Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2007), xii.
[102] Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 78–81, 128–131.
[103] Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 142–145.
[104] Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 169.
[105] Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, xiii, 72.
[106] See, for example, Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 45–46. Herdt writes that Augustine "did deny that pagans could possess true virtue, but his attitude toward pagan

derstanding of the Church, accompanied by the notion that virtue denotes an increase in participation and conformity to the life of the Word, a life all humans restlessly desire (*conf.* 1.1.1). Therefore, when we do find such virtue, there can be no question that it is God's action working in them (*c. Iul.* 4.16).[107] Accordingly, not only can Christians teach others how to do the various jobs needed in a functioning society virtuously, they can learn from others how to do so.[108]

CONCLUSION—HOC EST CORPUS MEUM

Through his writing at *The American Conservative*, Dreher continues to promote his option. The title of one particular piece rhetorically asks: "Benedict Option: What Else Is There?"[109] In an essay discussing the problems faced by the Church throughout the ages, G. K. Chesterton penned a more pithy response than that given in this essay, writing: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."[110]

The work of Augustine has served as our guide in an attempt to explain why Dreher's option fails to grasp this point. By starting at the beginning, as it were, and discussing the cosmic framework of his ecclesiology, Augustine has helped us to see why it is that the Church must never act as a detached society. Put simply, if it were to do so it would lose its mission and identity simultaneously, for the world was made to be the Church. The world was meant to exist in perfect communion with God. Thus, the Church is tasked with a rescue mission, charged with bringing as many as possible to unity in Christ, not by force but by the rhetorical persuasion of a faith enacted through a life of virtue. Augustine reminds us that we must not usurp the prerogative of God by separating ourselves from an unjust society for we never know who is watching and do not know who will have a change of heart. At any moment, by God's grace a tare could be transformed into wheat (*s.* 223.2), becoming substance fit for incorporation into the one Bread that we share.

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virtue is more ambivalent and ambiguous than definitive, in contrast to Reformation and early modern appropriations of his critique." See following note for correction.

[107] Augustine of Hippo, *Answer to Julian*, trans. Roland J. Teske, in *Answer to the Pelagians II*. Here in response to Julian's examples of non-Christian virtue, Augustine writes that these virtues should not be thought as acquired apart from God's grace but asks Julian to "admit that these virtues are God's gifts in them."

[108] I find this element missing from Charles Mathewes's discussion on Christian engagement in the world, presenting the relationship in a one-way fashion. See *The Republic of Grace*, 215–16.

[109] Rod Dreher, "Benedict Option: What Else Is There?" from *The American Conservative*, April 14, 2019,, www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-what-else-is-there/.

[110] G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 28.

Is the Church in need of conversion? Absolutely, and Augustine reminds us that it will always continue to be in need of conversion this side of eternity. It is our task as Christians to be the kind of virtuous exemplars that both lend credibility to the life of Christ present within the Church and make that life known and present to the world in the hopes that both might be formed, however gradually, into the cosmic body of worship God intends creation to be. This was precisely the point of the man who first made Benedict of Nursia famous by devoting a whole book to his life in his *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great. The *Dialogues* is filled with numerous examples of lives of Christian virtue, each proclaiming Christ in his or her own unique way. Fittingly then, this essay finds a harmony with the *Dialogues* by placing the Eucharist at its center, for this is precisely where Gregory ends his work, exhorting his readers to offer themselves "during life as victims to God."[111] Christians, then, must not retreat or separate themselves from the world. Instead, they must seek within their homes, churches, and in their professions to be transfigurers of the world by being its salt and light. In doing so, they become the sweet rhetoric of God, their actions speaking the words which God wants the world to hear through Christ, head and body, joined in one voice: *This is my body, given for you*. ℳ

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[111] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 4.62.