

Spousal Vision: A Study of Text and History in the Theology of Saint Augustine

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I.

In the beginning of *de ciuitate dei* (*ciu.*), Augustine announces the subject of his work, namely, “to defend (*defendere*) the most glorious City of God, both as it is living by faith in the course of time, a pilgrim among the impious, and in the stable security of its eternal seat, which it now awaits through patient endurance.” Augustine goes on to remark that, in order to accomplish this task, he will not be able to “pass over in silence whatever the plan and logic of the task,” that is, the defense of the city of God, “stipulates to be said about the earthly city.” This city is one that, “in its desire for domination is itself dominated, even when peoples are enslaved to it, by the lust of domination itself.”¹ In the whole of *ciu.* there are few passages that are more familiar than this one, yet it is probable that we only rarely if ever hear it fully. It is interesting to note that discussion of the earthly city is not the primary aim of *ciu.*, but, because it is something which is required by the primary subject matter, it “must not be passed over in silence.” From the very outset of the treatise, discussion of the earthly city is secondary and derivative to discussion of the “most glorious City of God.”

1. The text of *ciu.* employed in what follows is that of CCSL 47 and 48. Unless otherwise noted, the trans. is that of Bettenson, with occasional adjustments. See St. Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin Books, 1972). The best brief commentary on the *ciu.*, complete with an excellent bibliography, is G. O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). On the idea of contrast, see p. 164, though here the emphasis is the other way around, highlighting the city of God by contrasting it with its opposite. See also pp. 53–66 on “The Theme of the Two Cities.”

II.

It is not really hard to see why this should be true, for the earthly city, as such, cannot be detected apart from its contrast to the city of God. The earthly city is characterized by its desire to dominate and enslave nations or peoples, a project most fully realized in empires. But, surely, the imperial enterprise is visible enough in human history apart from discussion of the city of God! The empires are indeed all too visible. They are not hidden in the least! And Augustine will use the Roman historians to good effect in demonstrating the reality of imperial ambition and its consequences. But the “earthly city,” the *ciuitas terrena* as such, that is, as the “earthly city,” cannot be seen in any way—even analytically—apart from the perspective afforded by discussion of the city of God because it has no identity that can be discerned, described, or discussed apart from the contrast with the heavenly city that is afforded by “the Scripture of [God’s] people.”²

We learn later that the earthly city can be named as such, but this is only because scripture affords us enough perspective to provide it with a name: “Babylon.” “Babylon” is the name of the historical capital of the Assyrian empire, as Augustine points out (albeit incorrectly) in *ciu.* 16, and yet the name is lent to the whole earthly city: “Thus in Assyria,” Augustine comments, “the dominating power of the impious city prevailed. Its capital was Babylon whose name, ‘Confusion’ (*confusio*), is most apt for the earthborn city (*terrigenae ciuitatis*).” As such, the name becomes transferrable: “This took place about 1,200 years before the foundation of Rome, the second Babylonia, as it were, the Babylonia of the West” (cf. 16.17).³ As Augustine

2. *Ciu.* 1.praef. (CCSL 47:1): “scriptura populi sui,” the antecedent of “sui” actually being “rex . . . et conditor ciuitatis huius, de qua loqui instituimus.”

3. *Ibid.* 16.17 (CCSL 48:522): “In Assyria igitur praeualuerat dominatus impiae ciuitatis; huius caput erat illa Babylon, cuius terrigenae ciuitatis nomen aptissimum est, id est, confusio.” See also *ciu.* 16.4, on Gen. 11:1–10, the tower of Babel, which Augustine says is Babylon or “Confusion”; *ciu.* 16.11, where the same equation is made, noting that Hebrew was the original language from which the others were confused, leaving God’s people with their language unaffected. *Ciu.* 17.16 interprets the “queen” of Ps. 45:10–17 as “Christ’s Church, wedded to so great a husband by a spiritual marriage and a divine love.” Augustine comments, “This queen is Sion, in the spiritual sense . . . Jerusalem in the same spiritual sense, which is a point on which I have already said a great deal. Her enemy is Babylon, the city of the Devil, whose name means ‘confusion.’” When Augustine says he has already discussed this point a great deal, he is referring to *ciu.* 15.2, where he interprets the allegory of the two women from Gal. 4:21–5.1 as a reference to the two cities. Later on in Book 15, the city of God is called “Christ’s Bride” (*ciu.* 15.22, “sponsa Christi” [cf. CCSL 48:488]; see also *ciu.* 17.20, on the Song of Songs). The reader is intended to “hear” this designation as an overtone even in the shorthand of other passages, such as *ciu.* 18.35, where “Zechariah says of Christ and the Church, ‘Rejoice greatly, daughter of Sion! Shout for joy, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king is coming to you, a righteous king and a savior.’”

points out here and elsewhere, confusion is never visible as such apart from its contrast with order. Even the circumstances of Babylon's founding (and especially the resultant confusion of languages), evoke a contrast since the original language, Hebrew, remained unconfused among the forbears of Abraham. The earthly city can never be seen as such in this world, hence the ambiguity attendant on Augustine's use of the denomination "earthly city": sometimes it seems to be a synonym for an actual empire, especially Rome, and sometimes it seems to be a more generic designation. This is because it can only be "seen" in this world as one or another successful imperial project. Assyria is not itself the earthly city; rather "in Assyria the ungodly city exercised predominant power." But the "city" of which Assyria is only an outcropping or example is, as a whole community, no community; it is Babylon, or simply, "confusion." Like a cosmic black hole, the earthly city cannot be seen. Only the plumes of light that come from the stars caught in its undertow, in this case, the undertow of the *libido dominandi*, can be seen. Only the empires can be seen, and it is they that write history.

III.

The secondary or dependent status of the discussion of the earthly city is explicitly featured in the later books of *ciu*. Having already shown the origin (*exortu*) of the two cities in "the angels . . . and in the first two human beings," in Books 11–14, Augustine, as he begins Book 15, undertakes a discussion of the "development" (*excursus*) of the human component of these cities, "two classes (*genera*) of the human race," "one comprised of those who live according to man (*secundum hominem*), the other of those who live according to God (*secundum Deum*)," two "fellowships" (*societates*) of human beings, which, Augustine says, he "calls two cities, speaking

(Zech. 9:9). This king is the same bridegroom-king of Ps. 45. Isaiah prophecies about the bride also—we are expected to hear the reference to her in Augustine's citation of Isa. 54:1–5, which Augustine interprets as an allusion to the church figured in the barren woman who will bear many more children than those who did not have the reproach of being barren. Such passages also show that the feminine pronoun so often used to refer to the church or to the city of God in Books 15–18 is not simply an impersonal grammatical gender dependent on the grammatical gender of the noun *ecclesia*. The contrast Jerusalem/Babylon, with the heavenly analogue of the former being the bride of Christ, also evokes the book of Revelation (see O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 53–54 [n.1]). At *ciu*. 14.28, Augustine recalls the distinction between the two cities made in the preface, adding that these two cities are distinguished by two kinds of love, in one the lust for domination, in the other the love which generates mutual subjection in service: this passage is recalled in *en. Ps.* 125:3, "Duas istas ciuitates faciunt duo amores: Jerusalem facit amor Dei, Babylonem facit amor saeculi," a parallel pointed out by F.-J. Thonnard in BA 36.745 at n.43.

mystically” (*mystice*).⁴ This “excursus” occupies the whole of time, the whole of the “era” or “world” (*uniuersum tempus siue saeculum*) in which there are mortal human beings, that is, the whole of human history.⁵ Augustine is using the scriptures to help him track human history as the course of the two cities. Scripture offers an account of some historical events and it enables one to speak “mystically” about them because it enables one to see their meaning, otherwise obscure, hidden in the all too visible and “confusing” drama of empires. Both the “events” (*gesta*) in question and the written accounts of the events (*conscripta*) “are always to be referred to Christ and His Church, which is the City of God.”⁶ There probably were righteous people between the time of Noah’s sons and Abraham, but they are not recorded in scripture because, Augustine remarks, it is not the point of scripture simply to offer an historical register, but a narrative with a purpose:

It would take too long, and it would represent historical diligence more than prophetic providence. Accordingly, the writer of these holy Scriptures (or rather the Spirit of God through him) is concerned not only with narrating past events (*narrentur praeterita*) but also announcing future events (*futura*), though only those things which pertain to the City of God. For everything that is here said about those human beings who are not its citizens is said with this purpose, that it may show up to advantage, may be thrown into relief, by contrast with its opposite (*ut illa ex comparatione contraria uel proficiat uel emineat*).⁷

The point is that a prophetic reading of history enables its meaning, overshadowed by the grandiose transactions of empire,⁸ to be seen. The course of the city of God is revealed and, in the process, so is the earthly city, but by contrast. Thus, discussion of the earthly city in the Bible is secondary to discussion of the city of God and Augustine’s own account follows suit.

IV.

In Book 18, after a long hiatus, Augustine self-consciously returns to the topic of the “other city,” as he calls it, in order to emphasize its contrastive and subordinate

4. *Ciu.* 15.1 (CCSL 48:453), recalling language from 11.1 and elsewhere. On the structure of the work, see O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 67–73 (n.1).

5. *Ciu.* 15.1 (CCSL 48:453).

6. *Ibid.* 16.2 (CCSL 48:500): “ad christum et eius ecclesiam, quae ciuitas dei est, esse referenda.”

7. *Ibid.* 16.2 (CCSL 48:500–501): “nimis longum fieret, et esset haec historica magis diligentia quam prophetica prouidentia. illa itaque exequitur litterarum sacrarum scriptor istarum uel potius per eum dei spiritus, quibus non solum narrentur praeterita, uerum etiam praenuntientur futura, quae tamen pertinent ad ciuitatem dei; quia et de hominibus, qui non sunt ciues eius, quidquid hic dicitur, ad hoc dicitur, ut illa ex comparatione contraria uel proficiat uel emineat.”

8. Cf. *ibid.* 18.1: “The City of God developed not in the light, but in the shadow.”

character when compared to the city of God. He notes that his silence about the “other city” in the closing sections of Book 16 and throughout Book 17 was intentional, in order “first to bring out more distinctly the development of the city of God by describing its course, without interruption from its contrary, that other city (*a contrario, alterius ciuitatis*), from the time when God’s promises began to be more explicit.” But now he intends to outline the progress of that other city, enough, at least, so that “readers may observe both cities and mark the contrast between them.”⁹

Reading the history of the earthly city as Augustine narrates it there, one has the initial impression that it is simply like reading the history of the world, human history as such. It seems so unremarkable and so derivative¹⁰ that one feels justifiably tempted simply to skip Book 18 and get to “the good stuff” of Book 19. Indeed, had we forgotten that the narratability of something called the “city of this world” was itself remarkable and “mystical,” we would be unimpressed by the story of the “society of mortals,” still “linked by a certain communion in nature” from the time of Book 12,¹¹ the point at which this communion was first mentioned as part of Augustine’s recounting of creation.¹² Now this communion in human nature is seen only dimly, limned as a communion in pursuit of dominance on the one hand, or, barring that, in the preference of subjection and slavery to death—for the losers—on the other.¹³ The result, Augustine notes, is that—though all are subject to God’s providence—some nations have established empires while others are dominated by the empires. All this just sounds like human history without remainder. However, those who are aware of the pilgrim city, the city of God, can see that history cannot so simply be reduced to this history of striving for domination. This

9. Ibid. (CCSL 48:593): “ut ambae inter se possint consideratio legentium comparari.”

10. Not to mention “unwieldy, disorganized, and out of place.” For this description summarizing critics’ views, see Gregory W. Lee, “Republics and their Loves: Rereading *City of God* 19,” *Modern Theology* 27 (2011): 553–581, esp. 563. Despite its title, this essay is in fact the best recent discussion of both *ciu.* 18 and 19; it also contains a complete guide to all of the relevant literature.

11. *Ciu.* 18.2 (CCSL 48:593): “societas . . . mortalium . . . unius . . . eiusdemque naturae quadam communione deuincta.”

12. Ibid. 12.23 discusses human nature, emphasizing its natural solidarity. In 12.28, it is expressed this way: “For the human race is, more than any other species, at once social by nature and quarrelsome by perversion.” Cf. CCSL 48:384: “nihil enim est quam hoc genus tam discordiosum uitio, tam sociale natura.” It almost seems that 18.2 picks up here, i.e., where 12.28 left off, with Books 13–14 describing the “uitium” of original sin and with Books 15–17 describing the intertwined course of the two cities, but with Book 18 focusing squarely on the human community as it is, i.e., united by a vitiated nature and, as a result, unable to achieve its natural social calling except in continual attempts at subjugation.

13. Ibid. 18.2 (CCSL 48:593): It is the “uox naturae” which proclaims that subjugation is preferable to annihilation.

is only a partial account, and that of which it is a history has a name, the city of this world or the earthly city:

Now the society whose common aim is earthly advantage or desire, the community which we call by the general name of “the city of this world (*ciuitas huius mundi*),” has been divided into a great number of empires; and among these we observe that two empires have won a renown far exceeding that of all the rest. First was the Assyrian Empire; later came that of the Romans.¹⁴

The empires, especially Assyria and Rome, are visible enough, but the city of this world, as such, can only be seen “*mystice*,” in contrast with the city of God. It cannot be seen on its own as one thing because it is intrinsically fragmented, with no real identity of its own, except “confusion.”

It is interesting to see how Augustine recounts secular history. In Book 18, he uses as sources, not primarily the Bible, but the secular historians and other secular literary sources or Christian texts derived from them.¹⁵ Here the Bible is used mainly to map the history that the Bible relates onto the context of the secular history that the non-biblical sources relate, so that we can see the way that “Babylon progresses, along with the City of God, a pilgrim in this world,” with a view to contrasting the two (*ciu.* 18.2). As early as Book 11, the biblical text has served the wider purpose of providing the narrative of the origin and development of the city of God with which, by contrast, something called the “earthly city” can appear and have a narrative that transcends the narratives of each particular empire or would-be empire. Apart from that, what we find are only the individual narratives of empire, irreducible to each other, each vying, as it were, to order the world and to dominate the other. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how, in Augustine’s account, each imperial narrative is also irreducibly intertwined with myth. Not even Augustine can recount the history of these empires without reference to their myths as such. Even though many of these myths can be, and actually have been, demythologized by secular historians so as to show that the gods are illusory or were just deified human beings all along—or, as in the case of Romulus, if it is actually known by everyone that the “god” in question was originally human—these histories cannot be told without also recounting the myths.¹⁶ Even more, the myths, even when known

14. *Ciu.* 18.2 (CCSL 48:593): “sed inter plurima regna terrarum, in quae terrena utilitatis uel cupiditatis est diuisa societas (quam ciuitatem mundi huius uniuersali uocabulo nuncupamus), duo regna cernimus longe ceteris prouenisse clariora, assyriorum primum, deinde romanorum.”

15. For Augustine’s reliance on Eusebius and Jerome, see Lee, “Republics and their Loves,” 566 and the literature he cites there (n.10).

16. In the case of Romulus, Augustine comments in *ciu.* 18.24 (amplifying the remarks in 3.15, and preparing for those in 22.6) that Cicero regarded the elevation of Romulus into the ranks of the gods as a very special mark of affection since it happened not in primitive times of susceptibility

to be false, are enforced on those who are subject to the empire in question.¹⁷ There is no imperial history without the myth because there is no true rationale for any particular empire; each is actually motivated by the desire to dominate and, even more importantly, each is completely a function of the desire to dominate, since the earthly city is the one that, even in its domination, is itself dominated by the lust for domination. There is no “myth” that allows one to tell universal history. That is the function, as a byproduct one might say, of the story of the city of God; the story of the city of God is the prophetic denunciation of myth; it is the anti-myth with reference to which one can release universal history from its fragmentation into the various mythic narratives of empires.

to illusion and ignorance, but in the enlightened times of educated people. This elevation occurred as the result of Romulus’s disappearance during an eclipse of the sun, a regular eclipse (see 3.15) which was mythologized into a prodigy by its association with the disappearance of Romulus. The story that Romulus was suckled by a she-wolf may be true, as a special dispensation of God’s providence (18.22), but it was mythologized as a prodigy that showed Romulus was conceived by Mars (ibid.), and this myth was handed on as tradition such that the community “drank in this superstition with its mother’s milk” (22.6). In other words, even Cicero had to find a way to put a positive spin on the deification of Romulus because he could not adequately find a way of praising Rome and her founding without doing so and Augustine himself would not be telling the history of Rome if he did not repeat this myth and offer a way of reading it that explained its staying power. In a broader sense, since the earthly city is a “city of demon worship” (18.41), some of the myths intertwined with the histories are actually based upon events that were sponsored by demons. For example, the transformation of Diomedes’s men into birds, in order to mislead the Greeks into thinking Diomedes became a god (18.19 and 18.16–17, cf. in general 10.11–12, 16). It is the idolatry of the earthly city that makes it susceptible to such demonic tricks. The very name of the city of Athens is associated with a myth which is implicitly repeated every time the city is named and it is impossible to disentangle myth and history because some of the events involved in the competition between Athena and Poseidon were actual events initiated by demons, even though the irrationality of the outcome should have curbed the credulity of the citizens (18.9). In any event, the point is that Augustine cannot report the history of the earthly city, in this case Athens, without referring to the myths in which the history is inextricably interwoven (nor can Varro!—see, e.g., 18.10–11). The case is similar for Serapis in Egypt (18.5). However, in other instances, there is no demonic interference, just the credulity of those who are amazed at the talents or gifts of certain people, as in the case of Phegous in Greece and Isis in Egypt (18.3), Prometheus and Atlas, Mercury and Minerva (18.8), Apollo, Bacchus, etc. (18.13). Saturn, though originally a human being, is enshrined in the national epic, the *Aeneid* (18.15; cf. *Aen.* 8.321–325). How should we react to all of these accounts, Augustine asks, specifically with regard to the stories of prodigies worked by demons, but also, I think, with regard to the whole structure of mythologized history which they support: “And what can we say, except that we should ‘escape from the midst of Babylon’ (18.2; Isa. 48:20), by clinging to the Mediator, advancing by the steps of faith which ‘becomes active in love’” (ibid.; cf. Gal. 5:6). The pilgrimage away from the credulity caused by the lust for domination is in the love that forms the church. Little by little, that love enables the soul to be released from the attachments causing the credulity and it allows one to see history truly. In short, it is love that demythologizes history.

17. *Ciu.* 22.6, etc.

V.

Augustine explains the persistence of myths in the imperial histories—despite their evident falsity—by tying them to the worship of the gods in the public cults and to the way they are presented in obscene stage shows. Augustine’s protest against the obscenity of the staged presentations of the myths is one of the most persistent features of *ciu.*; indeed, it is almost a leitmotif throughout. On Augustine’s account, not only is empire intrinsically idolatrous, empire is also intrinsically pornographic. Those creating empires are dominated, Augustine says, by the lust to dominate. That is what they have in common, there is nothing rational at the basis of these projects of domination, essentially no “accounting” or “recounting” of them that would distinguish one from another. This is why the attempt to rationalize empire by historical narration really becomes an attempt to replace history by myth. Empires are founded in the “confusion” of the desire to dominate by those who are already shamefully dominated by that desire. And to justify themselves, to raise themselves above the level of shameful “confusion,” to erase the evidence of the irrational lust to power which causes shame, they mystify themselves as they tell their own story. The pornographic style of empire is related to this. Using the history of only one group of people to divinize and to worship certain human beings as that group rises to power distorts the meaning of the human person to meet the end of domination. Even when the myths are known to be false, the pornographic character of their representation ensures that the imperial dissembling they encode remains alive in the hearts of citizens.¹⁸ Augustine points out the irony that people live by myths even though they are known to be false. They survive as a commitment to a view of history obsessively recreated by the lust of those watching the pornographic performances.

VI.

Augustine invites us to explore the relationship between empire and the pornographic. Let us recall the first instance of the earthly city, later actually named “Confusion,” but having roots in the *confusi*,¹⁹ as Augustine calls them, the first

18. See *ibid.* 18.13 and 18.24. Such passages only serve to recall the discussion in Books 6 and 7 regarding the obscene stage plays and the obscene public rituals associated with the cult of the various deities, many of which are mentioned again in Book 18.

19. After sinning, Adam and Eve experience the loss of control of their bodies as well as novel, unbidden movements due to lust, which renders them “self-conscious and embarrassed” in Bettenson’s translation of “adtentos” and “confusos,” which means one is embarrassed because one is confused, i.e., “confounded.” Cf. *ciu.* 14.17 (CCSL 48:440): “And so they recognized they were naked, stripped, that is, of that grace which prevented their bodily nakedness from caus-

human couple, who were confounded and shamed as they discovered their own nakedness. Let us also recall how they reached this state. If we go back to Book 14, we realize that Eve, according to Augustine, was truly fooled by the devil, who had commandeered the serpent for this very purpose. Adam, however, is not fooled. Augustine does not exculpate Eve, but hers is not the decisive sin. The defining moment is when Adam fully and deliberately decides—despite *not* being deceived—to disfigure by sin the spousal fellowship he and Eve had already been given by God. Augustine puts this decision in slightly different ways as he narrates, but they are all variations on the theme of *superbia*: Adam, even before accepting the forbidden fruit, had fallen into the posture of a “self-pleaser,” one who puts love of self above love of God. He “lifted up his heart” to himself instead of to God; in other words, he worshipped himself. Augustine comments that, having defected from the love of God, Adam supposed that “he was only a venial transgressor if he did not desert the one companion (*sociam*) of his life even if it involved him in a companionship (*societate*) of sin.”²⁰

Commentators have generally been harsh on Augustine for seeming to imply that Adam should have abandoned Eve rather than enter into a *societas* characterized by sin. But Augustine’s description of the alternatives would seem to be made from inside the psychology of Adam, that is, from within his heart, which had already begun to be evil, even before accepting the fruit from Eve. It is true that Adam preferred to enter a fellowship of sin rather than to abandon Eve, but, in fact, these were not the only alternatives available to him. This is the way Adam, already a self-pleaser, constructed them. Adam already has the lack of imagination, and, thus, the carelessness, that afflicts all of the complacent and proud. What does not occur to Adam, who has learned to lift up his heart to himself instead of to God, is that, in some way, he could sacrifice himself for his wife in order to save her from the devil who had obviously fooled her (albeit through her own pride), instead of letting her stay in his thrall, thus sacrificing their companionship to Adam’s own

ing them any embarrassment (*confunderet*.)” Later in the same section we read “proinde confusi inobedientia carnis suae.” Bettenson translates “confusi” as “embarrassed,” which, while not inaccurate, does not quite capture the fact that it indicates the embarrassment that comes from being confused or stymied. “Confounded” seems more appropriate. Augustine is borrowing from the translation of Gen. that he is reading: “Nudi errant, et non confundebantur” (cf. Gen. 2:25, cited at *ciu.* 14.17 (CCSL 48:439)). See also “confusa” at *ciu.* 14.21 (CCSL 48:443), where it modifies “libidine” itself, meaning that the lust was jumbled, disordered, confused and, therefore, compelled them to cover up. The embarrassment arises from confusion and disorder.

20. *Ciu.* 14.13 (CCSL 48:435). Those who are “*sibi placentes*, self-pleasers,” are those who “lift up their hearts, *sursum habere cor*”—referring to the liturgical phrase “*sursum corda*”—“each to himself, *ad se ipsum*,” an act which belongs to “pride (*superbiae*).” Cf. esp. p.435, lines 30–32. For the claim that both Eve’s and Adam’s sin are functions of pride, see p.434, lines 3–6.

pride. He should have had mercy on her. Sacrifice is mercy, and, in *ciu.*, mercy is the true worship of God,²¹ though this worship is precisely what is refused by those who deny their heart to God.

That Adam had some alternative is clear from the contrasting story of the second Adam. Christ did not abandon us, and, though he joined us sinners, he did not enter into a fellowship of sin with us. He was prepared, in mercy, to sacrifice his own life for Eve, now in the person of the church, the new Eve (which presumably includes the old Eve). Adam had the chance, it would seem, to somehow “save” Eve by his own compassionate mercy, but he preferred to take advantage of Eve, committing himself to the complacent truncation of the imagination, the “myth” of the false alternatives. Part of his construction of these false alternatives is revealed in the story he tells God in order to explain what happened. As Augustine sees it, Adam blamed Eve, expecting that God would judge her and vindicate him²²—a version of the primal myth of empire invoking the divine as being on one’s side. Like the literary presentations of human suffering that, as Augustine explains in *confessiones* (*conf.*),²³ invite a false compassion in order to displace the true compassion of self-sacrifice, Adam, in following Eve into sin, enacts a simulacrum of mercy justified by a myth.²⁴ Moreover, in ratifying and consummating Eve’s original sin, Adam transformed it into original sin in the strict Augustinian sense. Original sin is the sin of Adam (*ciu.* 14.11), namely, the *willing of and the creation of a fallen solidarity*. It is the solidarity itself that falls and that thus loses its capacity to be narrated except by a contrasting solidarity which reveals the “nakedness” of the first solidarity, its cohesion as forced, as “confusion.” And, as such, it must be covered up by myth.²⁵

21. This has already been made clear in Book 10.4–6.

22. See *ciu.* 14.11: Adam was not seduced as Eve was; he knew what he was doing was sinful, but he erred “about the kind of judgment that would be passed upon his allegation that ‘The woman you gave me as a companion, she gave it to me, and I ate.’” Adam expected himself to be excused for a small sin and Eve to be blamed for the debacle.

23. Cf. *conf.* 1.13.20–21 on pitying and weeping for Dido at the expense of a true assessment of one’s own state.

24. This is the primal sin of the Roman Empire, which wishes to hear the account of the merciful God, who “resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” quoted in its own praise: ‘To spare the conquered and beat down the proud,’ thus perverting the worship of God, which is mercy, to its own glory or self-worship. The Roman Empire is one big idol, a false image of true mercy (*ciu.* 1.praef., citing Prov. 3:34 from the LXX [cf. 1 Pet. 5:5 and James 4:6], as well as *Aeneid* 6.853). See John C. Cavadini, “Ideology and Solidarity in Augustine’s *City of God*,” in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 92–110.

25. After all, how could Adam have sacrificed that to which he has lifted up his heart? It would mean sacrificing his “god.” Adam must keep alive his commitment to himself as his own founding prin-

VII.

If one goes back even further in *ciu.*, to Book 12, one will recall that Augustine noted the distinction between the creation of human beings and that of the other animals. Human beings were created out of one human being (*hominem . . . unum ac singulum creauit*), Adam, whereas the other animals were created by commanding many to come into existence at once. Augustine notes that some of these animals are of a solitary habit and others gregarious (*congreges*), preferring to live together in flocks or herds. But the specific social character of human beings is distinguished from these latter by scripture's unique account of the creation of human beings from one human being: "in this way the unity of human society (*societatis unitas*) and the bonds of human sympathy (*uinculumque concordiae*) would be more emphatically brought home to man, if human beings were bound together not merely by likeness in nature but also by the feeling of kinship."²⁶ A little later, as already noted,²⁷ Augustine comments that the human race is, "more than any other species, at once social by nature (*socialis natura*) and quarrelsome by perversion," and, further, that the creation of the human race out of one human being, from whom would be propagated a multitude, should serve as a salutary reminder to preserve "a harmonious unity in plurality."²⁸ The fact that the woman was made from the man is therefore an indication that human solidarity is not accidental; on the contrary, it is intrinsic to human beings:

ciple, as the source of his own coherence, though he has abandoned all coherence in preferring himself to the true God. He must now control the narrative, control the fact that there is no narrative. He must project the fact that he has cut off all possibility of genuine narrative into a narrative, into a community that supposedly has a story. This means he must dominate the narrative. His decision to remain with Eve is not a self-sacrificing, tortured descent into a companionship in which he hates to leave Eve alone. That would conflict with everything Augustine has already told us about pride. Nor is it even really a decision—Adam has already made his decision interiorly. He is now free only to sin. He goes with the flow of false alternatives. He has an interest in dominating the spousal community. Eve's interior decision to disobey God has made her vulnerable, but the original sin, one might say, is not finalized until it has corrupted not only human individuals but human community, that is, until Adam decides to take advantage of Eve's having been seduced. Here is the primordial instance of empire. Interestingly enough, it is construed spousally, if one can call something so loveless and cynical, "spousal." We may plausibly imagine that Adam re-configures sex, and the marriage it consummates, to an experience of the pleasure of domination and the corresponding pleasure of submitting to domination. Here is the connection between pornography and empire.

26. *Ciu.* 12.22 (CCSL 48:380): "eo modo uehementius ei commendaretur ipsius societatis unitas uinculum que concordiae, si non tantum inter se naturae similitudine, uerum etiam cognationis affectu homines neceerentur." Cf. *ciu.* 14.1 and 14.22.

27. Cf. n.12 supra.

28. *Ciu.* 12.28 (CCSL 48:384): "nihil enim est quam hoc genus tam discordiosum uitio, tam sociale natura. . . in multis concors unitas seruaretur."

And to this end, when he created the woman who was to be coupled with the man (*uiro*, for the first time), he decided not to create her in the same way as he created man himself (*ipsam . . . ipsum*). Instead he made her out of him (*ex ipso*), so that the whole human race should spread out from the one original human being (*ex homine uno*).²⁹

This is done not only in view of the biological unity of the human race, but with a view to their eventual fellowship with the society of angels (*sanctis angelis in aeterna pace sociandum*),³⁰ which means that 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. Augustine goes on to comment that “the fact that the woman was made for him out of his side also signifies how affectionate (*cara*) should be the union (*coniunctio*) of husband and wife.”³¹ It does not signify the domination of either spouse.

Augustine promises further discussion of this “prodigy,” namely, that the woman was created from the side of the man (*ex latere uiri femina facta sit*), and what it prefigured.³² This he takes up in Book 22, when he comes to discuss whether women will retain their sex in the resurrected body. This is an open question in patristic theology and one that some remarkable theologians, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, resolved by noting that the reproductive organs would not be present in the resurrection body.³³ But Augustine’s question is not simply whether the reproductive organs would be present, but *which* reproductive organs, that is, whether women would become men. The textual occasion for treating the question arises from scriptural passages from Ephesians and Romans which indicate that we are to attain to the “perfection of manhood (*in uirum perfectum*), the stature of the full maturity of Christ,” “conformed to the image of God’s Son.”³⁴ Augustine points out, famously, that, although all defects will be removed from the resurrected bodies of

29. *Ibid.*, 12.22 (CCSL 48:380): “quando ne ipsam quidem feminam copulandam uiro sicut ipsum creare illi placuit, sed ex ipso, ut omnino ex homine uno diffunderetur genus humanum.”

30. *Ibid.*, 12.23 (CCSL 48:380).

31. *Ibid.*, 12.28 (CCSL 48:384): “quod uero femina illi ex eius latere facta est, etiam hic satis significatum est quam cara mariti et uxoris debeat esse coniunctio.” Cf. *ciu.* 14.22 (CCSL 48:444).

32. *Ibid.*, 12.28 (CCSL 48:384).

33. See, e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection*, where Macrina, in her final speech, agrees with Gregory’s suggestion that the resurrected body will not have the trappings of mortality, the accretions to the body that are necessary for “sexual intercourse, conception, parturition, impurities, suckling, feeding, evacuation . . .” etc. For this trans., see NPNF 5:465.

34. *Ciu.* 22.17 (CCSL 48:835), citing Eph. 4.13 and Rom. 8.29.

the saints, the sex of women is not a defect but nature.³⁵ In other words, the woman is not a lesser version, a deformed or vitiated male, but has a beauty of her own that will be renewed and redeemed as such. Human solidarity is not intrinsically male; instead, it is intrinsically or irreducibly spousal. The eschatological vindication of the integrity of women is the vindication and fulfillment of the spousal significance of human solidarity. Human solidarity is not based on imperial homogenization. But what exactly is it based on? Where can the imagination turn if it wants to see human history in its *original* nakedness, before the shame of the “confusion” it fell into and before the shamelessness of imperial mythmaking that covered it? We do not want our nakedness exposed! How can we resist covering it up with just another myth? How can we move beyond the complacency of Adam’s lack of spousal imagination?

VIII.

In Book 12, as already noted, Augustine had commented that the original creation of Eve from Adam was an indication of the natural solidarity of the human race, and, as such, an indication of the eventual fellowship and solidarity we would have with the angels. There was thus an eschatological signification contained in the original spousal solidarity, a signification of grace.³⁶ After the Fall, this significance is retained; but now it is only a prophetic “prefiguration” of redemption in Christ. The passage cited above from Book 22 continues:

Now in creating woman at the outset of the human race, by taking a rib from the side of the sleeping man (*uiri dormientis*), the Creator must have intended, by this act, a prophecy of Christ and his Church. The sleep of that man (*sopor uiri*) clearly was (*erat*) the death of Christ, whose side, as he hung lifeless on the cross, was pierced by a lance, whence flowed blood and water. We know these are the sacraments by which the Church is built up (*aedificatur*).³⁷

Among other things, this passage sharply contrasts Adam’s self-interested lack of imagination for what it was and, in doing so, lays out a vista for our own imagination. If Adam had been less complacent, if he had not preferred to be a “self-pleaser” but had sacrificed that desire and clung to God in true worship, as did the good angels, he would have been able to imagine another alternative besides the false dichotomy of abandoning his wife or disfiguring their spousal companionship by exploiting

35. *Ibid.*

36. Cf. the use of *gratia* at *ciu.* 12.23 (CCSL 48:380).

37. *Ciu.* 22.17 (CCSL 48:835–836): “ut enim in exordio generis humani de latere uiri dormientis costa detracta femina fieret, christum et ecclesiam tali facto iam tunc prophetari oportebat. sopor quippe ille uiri mors erat christi, cuius exanimis in cruce pendentis latus lancea perforatum est atque inde sanguis et aqua defluxit; quae sacramenta esse nouimus, quibus aedificatur ecclesia.”

her vulnerability and assuming divine vindication in blaming the victim. He would have seen the sacrificial reference of his and Eve's own irreducibly gendered bodies, signifying a human solidarity based in the sacrifice of one's pride in worship of God. He would have seen it in his own person in relation to his spouse, for the mystery of "Christ and his Church, which is the City of God . . . has never failed to be foretold in prophecy from the beginning of the human race."³⁸

Commenting on the foolish and embarrassing nakedness of the drunken Noah in front of his sons, Augustine sees in it a foreshadowing of the nakedness of Christ on the Cross:

"He was drunk"—that is, he suffered—and "he was naked"; for then his weakness was laid bare, that is, was made evident. As the Apostle says, "he was crucified through his weakness" (cf. 2 Cor. 13:4). And that is why he also says, "the weakness of God is stronger than men and the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:25).³⁹

Christ accepts our nakedness, not an imaginary noble nakedness, but a nakedness that can be figured by the embarrassing predicament of Noah who got himself drunk and exposed his nakedness. Christ assumes *our* nakedness, puts himself in the foolish position of having no imperial narrative to hide it. This is not a pornographic nakedness, but the vulnerability of the would-be spouse before the brutal myths that deny there is any such thing as the spouse. This nakedness is weakness. From the perspective of "Babylon," of "confusion," someone should cover that nakedness with a myth, or, at least, with the concomitant pornography that makes of nakedness a shameless imperial entertainment.⁴⁰ In Christ, God has foolishly taken on the shame of our nakedness, but as the "Wisdom" by which the world was created, and not as myth. Christ, without cause for shame, accepts the shame we deserve out of love and, thus, the weakness he exhibits has a narrative hidden—because it is "foolishness"—to the imperium, the narrative of the spouse. This embarrassing nakedness is our own nakedness, or what we have made out of nakedness, transfigured, to borrow an expression,⁴¹ and it provides our imagination with all it needs to

38. Ibid. 16.2 (CCSL 48:500): "christum et eius ecclesiam, quae ciuitas dei est . . . cuius ab initio generis humani non defuit praedicatio."

39. Ibid. (CCSL 48:500): "inebriatus est, id est passus est, et nudatus est; ibi namque nudata est, id est apparuit, eius infirmitas, de qua dicit apostolus: etsi crucifixus est ex infirmitate. unde idem dicit: infirmum dei fortius est hominibus, et stultum dei sapientius est hominibus."

40. Note the comment of Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 178: "One sometimes gets the impression that the audience of Plautus and Terence would have guffawed uproariously all through the Passion."

41. The expression comes from *en. Ps.*, the most famous example being *en. Ps.* 30, s. 2.3. Section 4 of that sermon demonstrates the close connection between the image of bride and the image of

deflate all imperial mythmaking and to tell a different story, to re-narrate the story of human solidarity from the start.

If we are to recover the imagination to do so, we ourselves must, like the good sons of Noah, cover the nakedness of Christ not with myth but with honor. Augustine explains that Shem and Japheth's taking a garment and turning their backs on the nakedness of Noah is a figure of Christ's nakedness being in the past for us, honored by remembering it, by accepting a place in the narrative it makes possible. We have to take on the shame and embarrassment of "nakedness," of feeling as though we have no narrative because we have given up Babylon's claim that only an imperial myth is a real narrative. We have to be willing to sacrifice the narratives that clothe our nakedness with glory and prestige, even if it is the glory and prestige of claiming the purity of the victim. There is only one pure Victim, and he is also the one true Priest, the teller of the story, and we have to let his foolish nakedness define us. The question then becomes: How do we "escape from the midst of Babylon"⁴² but not from history?

IX.

Augustine continues from the passage cited above from *ciu.* 22.17, finding significance in the very word used to describe the creation of Eve from Adam: "This word, *aedificatur*, is the precise word used in Scripture of woman's creation; it says not that God 'formed,' or 'fashioned' a woman but that 'he built [the rib] up into a woman.' Hence the Apostle also speaks of the 'building up' of the Body of Christ, which is the Church."⁴³ Employing imagery from Eph. 4:12–13, Augustine explains that our coming into the perfection of the "perfect man (*in uirum perfectum*)" has nothing to do with all of us becoming men; rather, it is about the "building up" of the church, head and body together (*uir perfectus, caput et corpus*) and this body consists of all the members "who will be completed in their own time." This is a process that is taking place in history, over time, as people are added to the church: "Meanwhile, while the Church is being built up, members are added to the body every day, to which Church it is said, 'You are the Body of Christ and each of you members,'"⁴⁴

body as images for the church in Augustine's ecclesiology. See also Michael Cameron, "Transfiguration: Christology and the Roots of Figurative Exegesis in St. Augustine," *SP* 33, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 40–47, and idem, "*Totus Christus* and the Psychagogy of Augustine's Sermons," *AugStud* 36 (2005): 59–70.

42. See above, n. 15.

43. *Ciu.* 22.17 (CCSL 48:836): "aedificauit eam in mulierem." Cf. Gen. 2:22.

44. 1 Cor. 12:27. Note that at other places, e.g., s. 213.7.7, this verse is associated with the sacraments (here, baptism). In s. 272 (a brief homily without editorial section divisions), 1 Cor. 10:17 and

. . . and again, ‘We being many, are one Bread, one Body’ (1 Cor. 10:17).” It is a true historical process occurring in and through the visible, sacramental life of the church “by which the Church is built up.” The sacraments are the efficacious presence of Christ’s spousal love. The mechanism of their efficaciousness is not specified or, rather, it is specified precisely in historical, not imperial, terms. Christ’s spousal love is active as an historical, not imperial, agent, an agent of his nakedness and not of a myth. It is “mysteriously,” that is, “sacramentally”—one could even use “foolishly” as a synonym—efficacious, building up a visible solidarity of people whose only demarcations are the sacraments themselves. This is a people to whom Christ’s nakedness has been sacramentally mediated, whose solidarity and identity is defined by Christ’s spousal love alone, a visible foolishness, a nakedness, in that sense.⁴⁵

This solidarity, or foolishness, is denoted by the word “sacrifice” because the church has no other identity apart from the sacrificial love of the Bridegroom, and no other unity apart from that imparted by his sacrifice. As Augustine writes in a famous passage from Book 19, “it is we ourselves, we, his City, who are his best, his most glorious sacrifice. The sacrament of this sacrifice we celebrate in our oblations, familiar to the faithful, as we have maintained in the previous books.”⁴⁶ In claiming this identity by the use of the first person plural, Augustine is not indulging in the presumption that he or any of his readers are saved, members of the city of God in its eschatological clarity or perfection and, thus, no longer on the pilgrimage of trial and purification. Rather, it is a claim that the identity of the city of God is irreducibly a nakedness, irreducibly a foolishness, irreducibly Eucharistic. There is no other true “we” except for the “we” formed by the visible Eucharistic body. Any other attempt to say “we” will evoke imperium, the myth that covers nakedness. “We” cannot narrate an identity or claim a unity based on any achievement—whether exterior or interior—characteristic, righteousness, skill, nationality, or anything else. And yet, there is a “we,” and it refers to a visible, historical body, the presence of the city of God in history in the only way it can truly be present in history: freeing history from imperial mythmaking by and through its very presence.

How do people make the sacrifice that Adam should have made? When they allow themselves to be “built up” into a “we” not by their achievements, including especially their spiritual achievements, would-be achievements, prestige, or skill, but by “the sacraments” that poured forth from Christ’s sleeping nakedness. We make the sacrifice that Adam should have made when we honor this nakedness by

12:27 are used together to indicate the forming of the one body through the Eucharist.

45. May we say that seeing the church is the closest we can come to “seeing” grace in this world?

46. *Ciu.* 19.23 (CCSL 47:694): “nos ipsi sumus,” but note that there is a typographical error in line 182, where “non” is printed in place of “nos.”

letting it tell the story that defines how we say “we,” honoring the sacramentally demarcated church as the presence of the spouse in history. Seeing the spouse, in fact, *is* seeing Christ; for seeing this body is to see the nakedness of Christ, the embarrassing foolishness that takes away our shame at having no narrative but myth and that enables us to resist replacing it with myth. To narrate the history of this body is inevitably to narrate the story of a sacrifice made in love, of one who did not abandon the spouse, who did follow us into sin, but not into a “companionship of sin.” The true spouse had more imagination than that. His love was such that he, while having no sin, mixed himself in irrevocably with us sinners without being distinguishable as such, thus his nakedness. As Augustine quotes the prophet Isaiah, “as a sheep is led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was denied justice.”⁴⁷ He did not try to construct a self-justifying narrative, though he had no sin; in fact, he spoke no narrative. He thereby transfigures the “shame” of the fallen nakedness, shame at being exposed without a self-justifying myth, into the glory of being his own nakedness, the glory of feeling or, at least, actually being loved.

He thereby releases the narrative of world history from the grip of competing imperial myths and allows these all to be seen “mystically” as of one piece, as Babylon. According to Augustine, what the prophet Isaiah says, he says to the church:

Do not be afraid because you are made ashamed . . . for you will forget your endless shame, and you will not remember the reproach of your widowhood. Because it is the Lord who made you; his name is the Lord of Hosts; and he who rescues you, the God of Israel, will be called the God of the whole earth.⁴⁸

If we do not try to rise above the self-giving, spousal love of Christ by holding out for a better spouse, by holding out for one that is not so obviously mixed, we make the sacrifice that Adam should have made. And, as a result, we can begin to see history more clearly. Looking back at history, we can see the spouse clearer and clearer if we do not disdain the present church but see with the eyes of the Bridegroom. We see the scandals,⁴⁹ the divisions, the bad leadership, as well as the good

47. Ibid. 18.29, citing Isa. 52:14–53:12, the fourth “servant song.” In this passage, the servant has no outward characteristics that would distinguish him from the wicked and he is buried with evil-doers, as vulnerable as a lamb about to be shorn of its wool (stripped).

48. Ibid. (CCSL 48:620–621): “ne timeas, quoniam confusa es . . . quoniam confusionem aeternam obliuisceris et opprobrium uiduitatis tuae non eris memor. quoniam dominus faciens te, dominus sabaoth nomen ei; et qui eruit te, ipse deus israel uniuersae terrae uocabitur.” Cf. Isa. 54:1–5.

49. The purification of the church can be understood as a purification of the way members of the church, like Augustine, speak the word “we.” It is easy to oversimplify this process of purification conceptually by thinking of it as a process of mere separation. The “we” of the church is purified by eliminating some of those who now say “we” but who will not finally say “we.” It’s important to keep in mind that they will be eliminated because, in the end, they will not *want* to say “we”

examples, the unity, and the good leadership, but we see it with the Eucharistically formed, sacrificial love of the Bridegroom.⁵⁰ In the struggle to love, the scales are

except in the way that the community that is no community, the earthly city, says “we.” Of course a separation will occur, but the purification of the way the church says “we” is also a purification of the way the elect say it. *Everyone* says “we” with mixed motives, including the elect, who, as much as anyone else, say it out of an interior mixture of motives. They are as “mixed” interiorly as the church is “mixed” exteriorly and so, when they say “we,” they do not say it perfectly either. The two ways of being “mixed,” interiorly and exteriorly, are related. In *en. Ps.* 99.9 while commenting on Song of Songs 2:2 “like a lily in the midst of thorns, so is my beloved amid the daughters,” Augustine asks who are the daughters and who are the thorns before commenting that the thorns are thorns by their behavior, even though they are also daughters by the sacraments. He goes on to gloss his comment with Ps. 55:12–14 (cf. 54:13–15 LXX), verses about betrayal by a companion. He notes: “Is there any place to which a Christian can withdraw, to get away from the distress caused by false brethren? Where is a Christian to seek refuge? What is he to do? Should he seek lonely places? Scandals (*scandala*) pursue him there. Is a man or woman who is making progress to seek solitude, where there will be no one at all to put up with (*patiatur*)? But what if such a person was himself impossible to put up with, before he had begun to improve? If he thinks that because he has made some progress he cannot be expected to tolerate anyone else, his very intolerance proves that he has made no progress at all. . . . Is there nothing in you that anyone else has to bear with? If there really is nothing, I am amazed, that means you must have all the more strength to put up with other people. . . . ‘But I can’t,’ you answer. That means there are things in you that are a trial to other people. ‘Bear with one another in love’ (cf. Eph. 4:2).” This trans. is Boulding’s, WSA III/19, 20; for the Latin, see CCSL 39:1398. Augustine goes on to point out that even joining a monastic community will provide no refuge for the one who does not want to say “we” properly, that is, to “bear with one another in love.” All of these people one wants to escape from are siblings (“daughters”) by the sacraments and that is the only reliable basis for saying “we.” It is also what mediates the purification of “we.” The sacramentally-defined visible church is what mediates the purification of the “we” of the church. It cuts against the grain of those—all of “us”—who do not want to “bear with one another in love.” The interiorly mixed state of the city of God on pilgrimage in this world is a theme forcefully present in *ciu.* 19.27, where it is the occasion for all of its members to cry out, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (cf. Matt. 6:12). The mixed character of the church is also the subject of *ciu.* 18.49–51. Both the evil and the good swim inseparably together in the dragnet of the Gospel, to be separated only when the shore is reached (18.49). In the meantime, the good are grieved by the defamation of the Christian name by wrongdoers in the church and the difficulties that heretics create for evangelization. Yet this grief profits those who grieve because it issues from a love which makes them hate the thought that the scandal-causing wrongdoers and heretics should perish or hinder the salvation of others. It gives way to consolations of joy at their recovery from error (18.51). In other words, even those heretics who persist in heresy so far as to “part company with the Church (*foras exeuntes*; cf. CCSL 48:649),” and even the gravest evildoers who can be said to “persecute” the church by their behavior or error cannot be assumed to be reprobates and must remain the beneficiaries of the love that trains the church in patience, benevolence, and beneficence.

50. It is undoubtedly true for Augustine that, as Michael Cameron has brilliantly reminded us, “Christ meets me everywhere.” See his *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), vi. It is just as likely, or even more likely, however, that we will meet Christ first in the person of his spouse, the church, and perhaps that is a much more difficult meeting than is meeting him “everywhere,” even if that

slowly removed from our eyes. We can begin to see that love has been an historical agent from the very beginning. The imperial lie that love does not exist and does not act in history, that only force will prevail and that only prestige matters, is slowly uncovered as the myths that have disguised the lie are dismantled and the pornographic spell that enabled it to shamelessly teach that love (like the woman given to Adam) is too vulnerable to matter, that there is no spouse, and that the only ones who make history are those who conquer, is broken.

We can begin to read history this way when we read it, as it were, with the spousal vision afforded by the biblical text. We begin to see that the self-emptying love of God has never been absent from history, but, as a self-emptying, it is “hidden,” as Augustine puts it, “in the shadows” of imperial bombast. It is emptied to the point where it does not take over, but acts in and through the freedom of true historical agents which remain historical agents. Noah’s nakedness, for example, seems an unlikely image for the representation of Christ. Neither Saul nor David nor Solomon are particularly prepossessing as moral personages. None of them seem fit to represent Christ. But they do not serve as figures because of their evident personal fitness; rather, they serve because God has chosen to use them, without taking over their freedom. That prophetic figures have an intrinsic, not accidental, difficulty of interpretation means it requires a sacrifice to see them. They must be seen with “spousal vision.” Adam is a good example of someone who, because it would have meant a sacrifice, was not able even to “read” the figure he bore in his very own person.

X.

God’s kenotic love is also present in the text of scripture, “for Scripture is concerned (*consultum*) for man,” and its use of language is determined by that concern.⁵¹

“everywhere” is limited to “everywhere” in scripture (the title of the book comes from *c. Faust.* 12.27). But Augustine’s point is that encountering the church *is* to meet Christ in person, such is the unity of head and body in one conjugal flesh! There is no seeing Christ without seeing the spouse, because, without seeing the spouse, we do not see Christ’s love which created her as spouse; we experience only our own attempts at feeling righteous, at imagining what the spouse would look like if her identity were based on her (our) merits. Thus, there is no seeing the spouse unless she is seen as Adam should have seen Eve, i.e., with the eyes of the Bridegroom. Adam should have acted in accordance with the prophetic sign that he himself, together with Eve, represented. Instead, he invented empire.

51. *Ciu.* 15.25 (CCSL 48:493). In part this means that scripture narrates historical events, some of which have a mysterious, figurative significance, while the narration as a whole is meant to highlight the figures: “It is only the strings of the lyre, and of other similar musical instruments, that are designed to produce the music; but to effect the result the other components are included in

Commenting on the story of Noah's ark, Augustine has occasion to remind his readers that the books which have been preserved for so long and which were so carefully transmitted could not have been written for no purpose or simply in order to be consulted for *res gesta*, historical facts. Why would we need to know that there were included two of each unclean species and seven of each clean species, unless there were some significance in the details beyond the mere facts? And yet it is equally important that it *is* events that are narrated. The narration means that scripture is not just a text of figurative meanings, but has the character of interpreting history itself.⁵² Augustine is concerned to preserve "the truth of the history" because scripture is not simply a symbolic narrative of inner truths but a narrative that permits one to see what history really is:

The Scriptural narrative . . . gives an account of the succession of kings and of their achievements and the events of their reigns; and yet a careful examination of the narrative, with the help of God's spirit, reveals it to be more concerned—or at least not less concerned—with foretelling the future than with recording the past.⁵³

In other words, the scriptural narrative shows that these and other events "are always to be interpreted with reference to Christ and His Church, which is the City of God," as cited above. If the Song of Songs "voices a kind of spiritual delight felt by holy minds in the marriage of the king and queen of that city, namely, Christ and the Church,"⁵⁴ it can also stand in for the whole of scripture, which shows us

the framework of the instruments. These parts are not struck by the player, but the parts which resonate when struck are connected with them. Similarly, in prophetic history some things are recorded which have no prophetic significance in themselves; but they are there for the significant events to be attached to them, moored to them, as we might say." For this, see *ciu.* 16.2 (CCSL 48:501).

52. This is a point that Augustine repeats not only in the context of commenting on Noah's ark but also at several points in this section of *ciu.* Scripture prophesies by historical events (17.8), i.e., by the way it narrates them. And the result is that we can, e.g., recognize in Solomon a foreshadowing of Christ. The reverence of David for the person of Saul, carefully narrated by scripture in such a way that also emphasizes the fact that Saul is David's enemy, shows that the person of Saul bears a significance that transcends his immediate role in history (17.6).
53. *Ciu.* 17.1. (CCSL 48:551): "ipsa scriptura, quae per ordinem reges eorumque facta et euenta digerens uidetur tamquam historica diligentia rebus gestis occupata esse narrandis, si adiuuante dei spiritu considerata tractetur, uel magis uel certe non minus praenuntiandis futuris quam praeteritis enuntiandis inuenietur intenta."
54. *Ciu.* 17.20. (CCSL 48:589): "canticum canticorum spiritualis quaedam sanctorum est uoluptas mentium in coniugio illius regis et reginae ciuitatis, quod est christus et ecclesia." God's providential guidance of earthly kingdoms is not opposed to the free will of historical agents. In *ciu.* 5.1, Augustine makes the distinction between chance, fate, and providence. And he makes it clear that God's providence is not a disguised version of the myth of fate. After rejecting astrology, he says that God is not, in effect, a higher version of astrology and that correct belief in him does not mean that he takes the place of the stars in causing human beings to act in certain ways. Instead, God's

the key to demythologizing history away from the myths of empire. The key to demystifying empire is to approach history not by trying to seize it for oneself and by finding pleasure in the conquest, but by allowing a different pleasure to arise, the delight in the marriage of Christ and the church and to feel pleasure at seeing history re-invested with its true spousal significance. Uncovering the “allegorical draperies” of the text and, with it, of history means not doing away with history, but seeing in it the active presence of love. Any other way of reading history or of narrating it, including the ways practiced by the enlightened philosophers, will be captured by the tractor beam of imperializing myth.

XI.

Books 15–18 of *ciu.* are rarely studied. This is perhaps because the typologies, which seem so obvious to Augustine, seem so useless and artificial to us moderns. If this is so, why might it be the case? In part, Augustine would answer by acknowledging that he may not be correct about all the typologies that he uses.⁵⁵ Another part of the answer might be that he would like us, as his readers, at least to consider that we have already—and a little too readily—bought into the myth of empire. Perhaps we do not actually believe that love is operative in history; or, perhaps we believe that it is operational but only as a “spiritual reality” and, thus, we do not “see” it because we are both offended by the mixed character of the body that is said to fulfill the prophecies and offended by the figures of prophecy fulfilled in her. Perhaps we have a view of the church, of prophecy, and of the fulfillment of prophecy that is too triumphalistic. On all levels we want something that is clear and unmixed, something not in the shadows but in the open. We seek to eschew what the Bridegroom did not, namely, mixed company. We cannot forget that his case was even more extreme than ours precisely because, in his, it was the sinless one who mixed himself in with us sinners. If we do not eschew what the Bridegroom did not, if we allow ourselves to live in mixed company, configured to the nakedness of Christ mediated through the sacraments, we will begin to see the whole world and its history differently. We will see the love of God operative where we did not expect to see it, where we do not see, or, at least, do not want to see such love, preferring to justify ourselves instead. Seeing the bride with the eyes of the Bridegroom would be to accept the self-emptying, spousal love he offers, bearing

freedom and God’s providence is the reason that there can be any history. Note the dismissal of the various mythological accounts of history, in contrast to the narrative of Israel, in *ciu.* 4.34, the passage that immediately precedes the opening of Book 5.

55. Augustine, e.g., will take credit for only “varying degrees of success” in his discernment of the typologies. See *ciu.* 16.2 (CCSL 48:500): “alius alio magis minusue congruenter.”

patiently the failings of other Christians and praying even for those outside the church who are its enemies. Thus, the church would be a sacrament not only unto itself but unto the world. If we can see with eyes formed by the Bridegroom's love, configured to the sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, we will see that the Eucharist forms and marks a solidarity that is being built up and can be narrated, not by adding another imperial myth to compete with the others, but by showing all of the myths up for the cynicism and complacency they have exhibited since the time of Adam and Eve. This is to see history released from domination by the lust for domination. Isn't that the point? This is not a narrative of another holy empire but a narrative of freedom emerging from the captivity of empire, a narrative, as Augustine has insisted from his very first page, of pilgrimage.⁵⁶

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