

Becoming Gods by Becoming God's: Augustine's Mystagogy of Identification

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Introduction

In his autobiographical commentary on the *Confessions* the late Jean-François Lyotard relied on Augustine to envision how every human person remains a “creature at work, working for its conversion, one who does not stop turning toward the true light, so fearful is it of falling into delusion, into hallucination—a creature laments the anxiety of being abandoned to the night. Temporality blows death over things and signs.”¹ Lyotard rightly understood how Augustine approached the temporal world of “things and signs” with both rapt attention and a fearful mistrust, with both a need to engage created goods as well as an apprehension lest he get too close. For the great Bishop of Hippo realized more intimately than most how the world can either drag those made in God’s image down into the skeins of carnality, or can iconically bespeak God’s goodness and lift the rational mind to praise of its creator.

Such ambiguity makes the following homiletic trope all the more worthy of attention. In this essay I wish to examine a very curious and intriguing metaphor: Augustine’s exhortation that the faithful are to become the things of God. Far from the standard pastoral encouragement to become Christ-like or to take on certain virtues, he instead prompts his hearers to become the inanimate objects already revered by the Christian community. Some examples of this pattern include:

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, trans., Richard Beardsworth (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 45–46.

Love what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and become what you praise / *ama quod agis, imitare quod celebras, fac quod laudas*.²

Be what you proclaim—and you will be his praise if you live rightly / *uos estote quod dicatis. laus ipsius estis, si bene uiuatis*.³

Be gold . . . be God's riches / *esto aurum . . . esto diuites de deo*.⁴

When lifted to him, the heart of the faithful is God's altar / *cum ad illum surusm est, eius est altare cor nostrum*.⁵

Be valleys / *conualles estote*.⁶

Be chrism / *oleum estote*.⁷

In secret become God's living tree / *esto arbor uiua in occulto*.⁸

Become Jerusalem / *estote ierusalem*.⁹

Be the temple of God first, because in that temple he will readily hear you praying / *sed prius esto templum dei, quia ille in templo suo exaudiet orantem*.¹⁰

Augustine preaches for his hearers to become gold, chrism, God's living trees, or his holy city Jerusalem. The brilliance of the golden chalice, the lush fertility of the earth's valleys, or the beauty of the Christian temple all play a pedagogical role in showing the faithful how their lives must be formed.

While this list is far from exhaustive, there is already enough here to ascertain a definite pattern. First, such constructions almost always appear within the liturgy; second, almost always toward the end of a homily; and they, finally, usually appear in one of three ways: with the direct plural imperative *estote*, with the hortatory subjunctive *simus*, or with the indicative *estis* followed by a *si* or a *cum* clause, thus implying that one must first meet some particular condition before a transformation can take place.

This taxonomy as well as the context of each statement is not unimportant. These are ecclesial exhortations, offered only to the community of the faithful so

2. S. 345.5; PL 46.979. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

3. S. 34.6; PL 38.211.

4. S. 62.12; PL 38.420.

5. *Ciu. Dei* 10.3; CCL 47.275.

6. *En. Ps.* 103. exp. 2.11; CCL 40.1498.

7. S. 19.6; PL 38.137.

8. S. 25A.1.

9. *En. Ps.* 147.7; CCL 40.2144.

10. *Jo. eu. tr.* 15.25; CCL 36.161.

as to deepen their own lives with God. Such metaphors point to a mystagogy of identification: a mystagogy because it is the great Bishop's way of leading those who already bear the name of Christ into a more active spiritual and liturgical participation, an identification because it is based on ontological and epistemological preconditions which render signs efficacious only when they are assimilated into individual human lives. Augustine is accordingly striving to lead the faithful into a deeper charity by inviting his congregation not merely to gaze upon the images found in scripture or to watch the liturgy from a passive distance but actually to become such. This spiritual pedagogy asserts that true praise occurs only when Christian images and symbols are drawn into the human person as he or she is simultaneously drawn into the divine.

But what is implied by such identification? How can worshippers become the objects they encounter in the Christian narrative? This essay maintains that Augustine's insistence that the faithful are to become the things of God is motivated by three central convictions. The first is the iconic nature of the cosmos. The visible world betokens and bespeaks its invisible creator. The second is Augustine's own understanding of the role and purpose of signs which contain and indicate higher realities. He knew how God educates his people through visible things so they may better apprehend the invisible.¹¹ The third is his theory of, what I call, a sympathetic diligence, Augustine's deep appreciation of how love transforms the lover into what he or she beholds. By way of conclusion this essay then raises the often neglected heart of Augustine's soteriology—humanity's becoming gods.

Creation's Doxological Deiformity

In rendering these homiletic lines intelligible, the iconic nature of the cosmos must be examined first. All creation is doxologically deiform in that its very existence points to a self-sufficient and benevolent Maker. Furthermore, all creation praises God by manifesting, however faint, the divine's qualities in space and time. For Plato, the visible cosmos was the product of non-jealous divinity: since Goodness itself can not admit of any jealousy ($\phi\theta\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma$), it was fitting that God generate the visible world. Accordingly, this God is not only free and generous, he actually wills all things to be like him.¹² In similar fashion, Plotinus muses how the earth can be heard to say, "A god made me, and I came from him perfect above all living things

11. Cf. *en. Ps.* 44.5.

12. Cf. *Timaeus* 29D–30A; see also the famous definition of the visible order as the moving image of eternity later at *Timaeus* 37D.

. . . all things participate in being, others in life, others more fully in sense-perception, others in reason, and others in the fullness of life.”¹³

Such is the background to Augustine’s own sense of the universe, beautifully expressed in his own questioning of the cosmos: “I put my question to the earth, and it replied, ‘I am not he.’ . . . And to all things which stood around the portals of my flesh I said, ‘Tell me of my God. You are not he, but tell me something of him.’ Then they lifted up their mighty voices and cried, ‘He made us.’ My questioning was my attentive spirit, and their reply, their beauty—*Interrogatio mea intentio mea et responsio eorum, species eorum*.”¹⁴ This iconic role of contingent being is important because as Augustine came to understand it, the created order can now speak to us of God.¹⁵

The ultimate purpose of every creature is to raise the rational soul to the divine: a visible good is understood to be essentially a participant in God and its iconic role within the economy is precisely what makes it worth gazing upon, worth knowing. Only the correctly-ordered soul can allow the transparency of creation. For those who engage the world around them in such a rational and religious way (*pie quaerunt*), creatures point to the Triune God; those whose perception is blinded by pride, however, end up worshiping the creature instead of the creator.¹⁶ Such an inversion is also explained as a perversion: by settling on the creature, the deceived soul confuses material goods with God. This type of soul fails to soar upward to the divine but falls under the very bodies over which it is to have dominion, thus confusing these visible creatures with their craftsman.¹⁷

13. *Enneads* III.2.3; trans., A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* 3 (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1980) 53.

14. *Conf.* 10.6.9; Maria Boulding, *Confessions* (Hyde Park: New City Press) I/1, 242–243 (hereafter WSA and series and volume number); cf. *s.* 241.2 (411 A.D.) where this phrase is slightly altered: ‘pulchritudo eorum, confessio eorum’; PL 38.1134.

15. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Boucard, 1950) 98–103, argues that Augustine was present to hear Ambrose’s preaching on Genesis and would have there picked up on the triadic structure of creation. Drawing from Paul’s *a quo, per quem, in quo* (Rom 11:36), Ambrose delineates the creative act as one of beginning and origin (*principium et origo*), the continuation of all being (*continuatio*), and the end for which all creatures have been brought into being (*finis*); *Hexameron*, 1.5.19; CSEL 32.16. Next, arriving in Northern Africa, Augustine comes to incorporate the triad at Wisdom 11:21 as a suitable way to identify the Father with Measure, the Son with Number, and the Holy Spirit with Order, first appearing at *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.16.26 in 388/89.

16. *Conf.* 5.3.5: ‘[E]t conuertunt ueritatem tuam in mendacium et colunt et seruiunt creaturae potius quam creatori.’; CCL 27.59.

17. *Uer. rel.* 36.67: “Nam quoniam opera magis quam artificem atque ipsam artem dilexerunt, hoc errore puniuntur, ut in operibus artificem artemque conquirant, et cum inuenire nequiverint—Deus

In no way is this plunge into the visible order the fault of the created sign but of the disordered soul. Unlike the Manichean cosmology, creatures in the world of Christianity are morally neutral in that they can either direct humans toward the divine or can enmesh them in the allure of mortal transience. The soul must never regard creatures as marvels absolutely *in se* but in the Augustinian cosmos they are to be iconic indicators of the divine. Signs are to show the mind something beyond themselves.¹⁸ Let us now focus more particularly on this interaction between soul and sign. How do creatures lift the soul to God and how does Augustine describe this process?

Becoming Living Signs

The diaphanous nature of creatures compels Augustine to be very cautious with regard to what objects he displays as worthy of observation and, in this way, his understanding of signs emerges as the second crucial component of the exhortations under consideration. As bishop and pastor, Augustine is understandably discerning with regard to what objects he holds in front of his flock for their attention and emulation. He understands the power of the sympathy, the effect of the affection, when a human knower encounters an earthly sign. He appreciates how created goods have the power to transform, always aware of the intricate relationship between knowing, loving, and becoming.

The soul can either strain for that place from which it came or it can settle for visible goods. This latter alternative is a matter of isolation, disparateness, and powerlessness, a violation of the soul's highest nature. By losing sight of the proper—that is, iconic—role of created goods, the soul accordingly loses itself and becomes absorbed in the allure of materiality. Instead of a clear ordering of creatures unto God, in this fallen state, the soul becomes confused with what it is to master. It has loved wrongly and has thus become distorted. Plotinus would explain it thus:

Now when a soul . . . does not look towards the intelligible (τὸ νοητὸν), it has become a part and is isolated and weak and fuses and looks towards a part and in its separation from the whole it embarks on one single thing and flies from everything else . . . applying itself to and caring for things outside and is present and sinks deep into the individual part.¹⁹

enim non corporalibus sensibus subiacet, sed ipsi menti supereminet—ipsa opera existiment esse et artem et artificem.”; CCL 32.231.

18. Cf. *doc. Chr.* 2.2.1

19. *Enneads*, IV.8.4; Armstrong, 4.408–409

Augustine clearly echoes this ability of the individual soul to lose its way, finding itself not only forgetful of its divine image but conforming itself to those things which should remain below it. That is, when the human soul turns away from God, it becomes confused with lower goods; loving creatures instead of their creator, the soul becomes fused with the world.

Left on its own the human soul is unable to interact rightly with the barrage of external goods surrounding it. Augustine's strategy of being removed from this morass is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God as unifier and gift possesses the particular responsibility to ensure that the human soul remains above the rest of the visible order and hence united with the divine: "It is love which conforms us to God and thus conformed and configured to God and cut off from this world, we are not confounded with the things which ought to be subject to us. This is done only through the Holy Spirit."²⁰ When cutting himself off from the divine, the human person attaches himself to created goods and consequently falls below even that over which he was intended to dwell. In the Holy Spirit, however, the faithful are given the requisite power to live *through* visible creatures and to rise above them so as to be united to the divine.

The Holy Spirit not only gathers in the fragmented because sinful soul, he frees human nature from its self-imposed identification with mortal goods by uniting it to the Triune life, "gluing" us to the Son at the Father's right hand. Such agency is encountered in Augustine's commentary on Ps 62 where *gluten* is identified with the Holy Spirit, the love of God: "Where are we to find the strong glue? The glue is charity. Have charity in you and it will glue your soul into place, following God. Not with God, but behind God, so that he goes ahead and you follow."²¹ The Holy Spirit properly orders creation by raising those in whom he dwells above the rest of the visible order, attaching them to God in a bond which allows human persons to appropriate the divine life.

Conversely, without the Holy Spirit, the human person risks knowing carnally (*carnaliter sapitur*) and therefore risks becoming one with lower sensibles. This is a threat every incarnate soul faces living in a world surrounded by icons which potentially lead to God or can prove to be ensnaring idols. That is, when the soul loves God through the signifier, the soul becomes divine, when the soul loves the

20. *Mor.* 1.13.23: "Fiet ergo per caritatem ut conformemur Deo et ex eo conformati atque figurati et circumcisi ab hoc mundo non confundamur cum his quae nobis debent esse subiecta. Fit autem hoc per spiritum sanctum.;" CSEL 90.27.

21. *En. Ps.* 62.17; Boulding, *Expositions* (WSA III/17), 243. Cf. 'The Glue Itself Is the Charity: Ps 62:9 in Augustine's Thought,' *Collectanea Augustiniana: Presbyter Factus Sum*, ed., J. Lienhard, E. Mueller, and R. Teske (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) 375–384.

sign instead of God, the soul is made bestial. One knows carnally when one mistakes a sign for a thing and consequently falls to the level of beasts by becoming fixated on the visible sign. Unable to see *through* signs and see their creator is the death of the soul (*mors animae*), and this soul now finds itself unable to drink in the eternal light. As long as the believer sees the Sabbath as another day of the week or as long as he thinks only of bloodied victims when he hears the term *sacrificium*, he remains wretched (*miserabilis*).²²

How different is this kind of admonition when compared to those instances where the faithful are encouraged to become Sabbath, to become sacrifice:

We ourselves are God's city, his most brilliant and eminent sacrifice / *Huius autem praeclarissimum atque optimum sacrificium nos ipsi sumus, hoc est ciuitas eius.*²³

We ourselves shall be that seventh day / *dies enim septimus etiam nos ipsi erimus.*²⁴

Believers must cease seeing economic signifiers as external realities only but must strive to meet God through these signs in such a way that they become, say, God's living rest or God's divine sacrifice.

A spirituality of identification is clearly the great Bishop's pastoral plan for drawing believers out of themselves and into God, through the things of God. This is not a meager aestheticism, not mere decoration covering the Christian experience. Instead it is a rich confession of how God allows himself to be glimpsed in religious symbols and, as such, these elements of the Church's life bring the faithful into a sympathetic participation aimed at their divine transformation. Let us now concentrate on this very Augustinian notion of how embracing what one encounters changes lovers into that which they hold dear.

22. Cf. *doc. Chr.* 3.5.9: "Cum enim figurate dictum sic accipitur, tamquam proprie dictum sit, carnaliter sapitur. Neque ulla mors animae congruentius appellatur, quam cum id etiam, quod in ea bestiis antecellit, hoc est intellegentia, carni subicitur sequendo litteram. Qui enim sequitur litteram, translata uerba sicut propria tenet neque illud quod proprio uerbo significatur refert ad aliam significationem. Sed si 'Sabbatum' audierit, uerbi gratia, non intellegit nisi unum diem de septem, qui continuo uolumine repetuntur; et cum audierit 'Sacrificium,' non excedit cogitatione illud quod fieri de uictimis pecorum terrenisque fructibus solet. Ea demum est miserabilis animae seruitus, signa pro rebus accipere, et supra creaturam corpoream oculum mentis ad hauriendum aeternum lumen leuare non posse.;" CCL 32.83.

23. *Ciu. Dei* 19.23; CCL 47.694–695. Note CCL's typographical error of "non" for this "nos" at line 182 on 47.694.

24. *Ciu. Dei* 22.30; CCL 47.865.

Becoming the Beloved

The Platonic tradition is clear: love attracts, unites, and transforms.²⁵ Such an insistence is the third aspect of Augustine's thought which renders these homiletic exhortations intelligible: his epistemological and volitional presuppositions. First, the theory of knowledge upon which he is reliant explains human interaction with the visible world as the sympathy between knower and known. The human soul dwells in an amphibious state between visible goods and the divine, and the innately undetermined soul is actualized only in the act of engaging the world. Again, by turning to Plotinus we can see how his epistemology maintained that through those bodily organs which are naturally oriented toward visible objects (explained as a *συνεχῶν ὄντων*), the soul comes into a certain unity and common affection (*ὁμοπαθής*) with objects of knowledge.²⁶ Plotinus taught that in order for the individual soul to be active in the material order, the soul must find a level of unity with the material order and achieves this by translating the disparate physical passions (e.g., lust, hunger, pain, . . .) into intelligible *noeta*.²⁷ Plotinus realized that through those bodily organs which are naturally united with visible objects, the soul comes into a unity and a common affection with the external world as well. In so doing, a connection between knowing and becoming necessarily arises: we become those things with which we have intellectual sympathy.

Augustine would have easily learned from "the books of the Platonists" how such instances of sense perception involve not only an act of knowledge but also an act of becoming. This relationship is expressed at the end of the *de anima et eius origine* (419/21). Admitting ignorance before an intellectual foe, Vincent Victor, Augustine is trying to figure out the hidden powers of the human mind and their peculiar ability to shape our own identities. He accordingly asks:

How is it, then, that we are somehow taken away from and denied to ourselves and then that we are somehow brought back and restored to ourselves? It is as though we were other persons or in other places, when we looked for and did not find what we had put in our memory. How is it that we ourselves could not get at ourselves as if we were somewhere else? And then we do get at ourselves when we find it. After all, where do we look except in ourselves? And what do we look for but ourselves, as though we were not in ourselves, and had withdrawn

25. Cf. Plato, Republic 6.485D6; Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.13.

26. *Enneads* IV.5.1; Armstrong, 4.280.

27. *Enneads*, I.1.7; Armstrong 1.108. Truth arises when the soul achieves this identification; error creeps in when the soul fails to raise sensible impressions upwards to the level of *νοητο*. and consequently mistakes sensibles for eternal; cf. *Enneads* 5.1.5; 5.3.8; 5.3.11; 5.4.2.

somewhat from ourselves? Do you not see and are you not astonished by this deep puzzle?²⁸

The *profunditas* in question is the connection between epistemological encounters and personality. Change in identity is hence bound up with the integrity of the human mind. Gathered and recollected, we are present to ourselves; when scattered, our true self is distant and denied to us.

As subtle as this relationship between knowing and becoming may be for Augustine, a parallel phenomenon is much more explicit: becoming what one loves. As early as *de ordine* (Nov 386–Mar 387) Augustine knew that love consists in the lover's longing to be united with the beloved. For what is love, he asks, if not the reaching out and becoming one with what one loves?²⁹ Love conforms and couples lover and beloved. Or as *qu. 35* of *de diuersis quaestionibus* a few years later makes clear, love is a tendency, a movement, and a striving towards another.³⁰ As such, Augustine continues, love results in the lover's being transformed by the beloved: "Because that which is loved necessarily affects the lover from its very own being, when eternity is loved, it affects the soul of the lover with eternity."³¹ In other words, love not only yearns for, persists and delights in its object, love also configures the lover to that which he or she loves.

28. *An. et or.* 4.7.10: "Numquid nos non eramus, quando id cogitabamus? Nec tamen hoc sumus quod fuimus, quando id cogitare non possumus. Quid est ergo, quod nescio quomodo subtrahimur negamurque nobis itemque nescio quomodo proferimur ad nos reddimurque nobis. Quasi alii simus, et alibi simus, quando quaerimus, nec inuenimus quod in memoria nostra posuimus, neque nos ipsi ad nos ipsos ueluti alibi positos peruenire possumus, et tunc perueniamus quando inuenimus? Ubi enim quaerimus nisi apud nos? Et quid quaerimus nisi nos? Quasi non simus in nobis, et aliquo recesserimus a nobis? Nonne attendis et exhorrescis tantam profunditatem? Et quid est hoc aliud quam nostra natura nec qualis fuit, sed qualis nunc est? Nonne attendis et exhorrescis tantam profunditatem?"; CSEL 60.389–390; Teske, *The Nature and Origin of the Soul* (WSA I/23) 539–540. Cf. Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth and Company, 1987) 149.

29. *Ord.* 2.18.48: "Quid amor omnis? Nonne unum uult fieri cum eo, quod amat, et si ei contingat, unum cum eo fit?"; CCL 29.133. A similar question is found as late as *Trin.* 8.10.14: "Quid est ergo amor nisi quaedam uita duo aliqua copulans uel copulari appetens, amantem scilicet et quod amatur?"; CCL 50.290–291.

30. *Diu. qu.* 35.1: "Nihil enim aliud est amare quam propter se ipsam rem aliquam appetere. Num igitur propter se ipsum amor appetendus est, cum quando desit quod amatur, ea sit indubitata misera? Deinde cum amor motus quidam sit, neque ullus sit motus nisi ad aliquid, cum quaerimus quid amandum sit, quid sit illud ad quod moueri oporteat quaerimus."; CCL 44A.50. David Mosher dates this question at 391, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press) 20.

31. *Diu. qu.* 35.2: "Et quoniam id quod amatur afficit ex se amantem necesse est, fit ut sic amatum quod aeternum est aeternitate animum afficit."; CCL 44A.52.

We see the connection between this sort of sympathy and the power of the liturgical sign to transform the soul throughout *sermo* 15, dated at 418. Augustine begins by assuming all those present love the physical beauty of God's house. Finding themselves within beautifully constructed walls (*in fabrefactis parietibus*), before shining marble (*in nitore marmorum*), and under gilded ceilings (*et laqueariis aureis*), the congregation is instructed to see how the splendor of God's own house (*decorem domus Domini*) can be found most perfectly in themselves, in the church's faithful and holy people (*sed in hominibus fidelibus, sanctis*).³² Delighting in their gazing, in the elegance and magnificence of the basilica, the faithful learn to see how they are to become the true temples of God.

Furthermore, as the faithful look around they notice that in God's house are found vessels of gold and silver as well as vessels of wood and clay (cf. 2 Tm 2:20). These too provide Augustine with a catechetical moment common to his pastoral tone: the reality of the *ecclesia permixta*. Admitting that it is not always easy to love one's neighbor, the bishop advises that where Christians struggle to find beauty, they should become such and then they will find it in their neighbor. He insists: "You have looked but not discovered what you were looking for because you have not become what you are looking for. Similarity finds unity with what is similar, that which is unlike repels the unlike"³³ The existential sympathy between knower and known, between lover and beloved, is again apparent and yet now extended: become that which the Christian story reveres—charity—and you will assist your neighbor in becoming it as well. To show this, the glittering vessels of gold are held aloft in a pedagogical fashion. The allure of gold is analogous to the draw one experiences in and toward love. If one feels repulsion when gazing upon such ecclesial beauty, however, it indicates his spiritual disfigurement. For, if one is carnal and ignoble, the same sight will repel and the house of God will seem foreign and alienating to those who refuse to become that house.³⁴

It is in this way that our preacher's metaphors to become the things of God are ultimately ordered towards becoming like God himself. Light, the Sabbath, sacrifice, gold, and oil are efficacious only insofar as they find a home in the hearts of the

32. *S.* 15.1; PL 38.116.

33. *S.* 15.2: "Ideo enim quaesisti et non inuenisti, quia quod quaesisti tu non fuisti. Similis simili cohaeret, dissimilis dissimilem refugit."; PL 38.117.

34. *S.* 15.2: "Si fueris uas in contumeliaam, procul dubio uas in honorem graue tibi erit et ad uidendum. Non audis quomodo quidam de quodam dicant, *Grauis nobis est etiam ad uidendum?* Quod tibi graue est ad uidendum, quando erit apertum ad inueniendum? Vasa enim ista, interiorum hominum sunt. Non utique cum uisus fuerit iustus, iam agnoscitur iustus. Eumdem aspectum habet et iustus et iniustus: uterque homo, sed non uterque domus Dei. Et si ambo christiani appellantur."; PL 38.117.

faithful. As signs which point us to God, the transformation that these scriptural and liturgical symbols effect are ultimately aimed have been at making God's people like himself. Let us now turn to this final aspect, humanity's life in the divine. All the exhortations listed at the beginning of this essay have a single purpose: to instruct Christian congregations how to love rightly and thus become God.

Conclusion: The Worshipping Church Is to Become Christ

The ultimate result of Augustine's theory of the lover's becoming the beloved is his insistence that becoming divine is the essence of Christian redemption. A typical example is found in homilies on the *First Letter of John* where this dynamic of lovers becoming what they love results in what is admittedly found to be a rather audacious claim. "Each person is as his love. Do you love the earth? You will be earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? Will you be God? Listen to Scripture, for I dare not say this on my own: You are gods, and sons and daughters of the Most High, all of you."³⁵ Loving the things of the earth causes one to be terrestrial, loving God renders one divine. In the end, these are the only two options. Or as we hear in *de patientia* (415/17), there are only two types of lives: earthly or heavenly, animal or spiritual, devilish or deifying (*illa diabolica, ista deifica*).³⁶ As we have seen, these two ways of life are in large part determined by how one encounters and embraces created goods.

Liturgical signs especially unite to God those who worship rightly and Augustine does not hesitate to call them gods: *Deus facitque suos cultores deos*.³⁷ In fact, as he wrote against the Manichean denial of human communion, truly religious societies are united only through such tangible signs: "nothing other than visible sacraments and signs are able to join human persons together in union."³⁸ As Gerald Bonner has rightly argued, this is how deification for Augustine is an "ecclesial process" in that only the communion of Christ's people and the liturgical vehicles (Bonner concentrates on the Eucharist) which causes this bond, can bring enfleshed human persons to participate in the divine life.³⁹

35. *Ep. Jo.* 2.14.5: "[Q]uia talis est quisque, qualis eius dilectio est. Terram diligis? Terra eris. Deum diligis? Quid dicam? Deus eris? Non audeo dicere ex me, scripturas audiamus: *Ego dixi: dii estis, et filii altissimi omnes.*"; PL 35.1997.

36. *Pat.* 14; CSEL 41.679.

37. *Ciu. Dei* 10.1; CC 47.273.

38. *C. Faust.* 19.11; "[C]oagulari homines possunt, nisi aliquo signaculorum uel sacramentorum uisibilium consortio colligentur."; CSEL 25.510.

39. Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986) 369–386; 383.

Deification in Augustine is only now receiving sustained scholarly attention. No book-length study has yet been published, and the articles and book chapters treating this fulfillment of the Christian life still number only a couple of dozen.⁴⁰ These works have all attempted to recover participation in the divine life within Augustine's theological macrostructure. Hitherto, the role of sign and symbol in helping the faithful to become godly has been a neglected theme; our study has perhaps started that conversation.

A provocative instance of this relationship between deification and the use of liturgical signs can be found in the recently discovered *sermo* 23B. Buried centuries deep in a volume of homilies collated by the *Karthauser* in Mainz sometime between 1470 and 1475, *sermo* 23B comes from this recently discovered collection.⁴¹ These 26 sermons were delivered either in the city of Carthage or in the dusty towns of the Medjerda valley between 397 and 404. They provide us with a picture of a passionate

40. One unpublished doctoral essay dedicated to *deificare* in Augustine's sermons does exist in Afrikaans: J.A.A. Stoop *Die Deificatio Hominis in die Sermones en Epistulae van Augustinus* (Leiden: Drukkerij Luctor et Emergo, 1952) 87 pages. Among the more significant articles, in chronological order, are: Victorino Capánaga, "La deificación en la soteriología agustiniana," *Augustinus Magister* 2 (1954) 745–754; Gustave Bardy, "Divinisation: Chez les Pères Latins," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957), ed., M. Viller et al., and continued by C. Baumgartner et al., Tome 3, section 3: Augustine is treated at 1395–1397; Georges Folliet, "*Deificari in otio*: Augustin, *Epistula* 10,2," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 [supplement: *Hommage au R.P. Fulbert Cayré*] (1962) 225–236; Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976) 135–152; Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Concept of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies*, op. cit. [see also Bonner's magisterial encyclopedia entries: "Deificare," *Augustinus-Lexicon*, 2.265–267; "Deification, Divinization," *Augustine Through the Ages*, 265–266]; Roland Teske, "Augustine's *Epistula* X: Another Look at *Deificari in Otio*," *Augustinianum* 32 (1992) 289–299; José Oroz Reta, "De l'illumination à la déification de l'âme selon saint Augustin," *Studia Patristica* 27 (1993) 364–382; Augustine Casiday, "St. Augustine on deification: his homily on Psalm 81," *Sobernost* 23 (2001) 23–44; Henry Chadwick, "Note sur la divinisation chez saint Augustin," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 76.2 (2002) 246–248; Robert Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed., Stephen Finland and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006) 122–133. Concentrated studies within larger works on deification include: Pedro Urbano López de Meneses, *Theosis: La doctrina de la divinización en las tradiciones cristianas: Fundamentos para una teología ecuménica de la gracia* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A., 2001) 112–124; Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford, 2004) 227–251; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford, 2004) 329–332.

41. The sermon to be analyzed here appears as number 13 in the Mainz collection, Dolbeau has named it number 5 within the recently discovered sermons but we shall refer to this sermon by its numbering as found in the Maurist classification, 23B. For a brief history of these sermons, see John Rotelle's introduction to Hill, *Sermons* (WSA III/11) 13–17; also François Dolbeau's very insightful 'Le sermonnaire augustinien de Mayence (Mainz, Stadtbibliothek I:9): Analyse et histoire,' *Revue Bénédictine* 106 (1996) 5–52.

pastor encouraging the recently converted Catholics before him to understand the uniqueness of their faith and not to fall into the pagan temptations of late antiquity. One of the main concerns of Augustine is to have the faithful understand the plural *dii* properly, “gods” found not only in the non-Christian world around them but in their own sacred texts as well.

He therefore contrasts these “gods” which the pagans make out of stone, gold, and silver with the “gods” made by the one deifying God (*Deus deificator*), an epithet unique to Augustine. He describes the two ways of life in terms of (1) those who become less than material signs by making them into objects of divinity and (2) those who are made divine by allowing material goods to be what God intends. For what is better, asks the bishop, to make gods or to become gods?⁴² He then goes on to invite the pagans directly (were known non-Christians present or was he supplying his flock with ammunition against their still unconverted neighbors?) not to become the wood they adore and therefore cease to be human (*non ut sis lignum et esse desinas homo*).⁴³ Then after a lengthy excursus on the dangers of such idolatry, he concludes with an example from the *torcular*, the oil press. Augustine insists that all present are to leave the dregs of lust and error behind after being pressed and turned into pure chrisem: “be the oil” and not the dregs.⁴⁴ What is striking about this final instruction is not only that Christians are exhorted to become the oil of God but that it comes after an entire discourse dedicated to *not* idolatrously becoming mere creatures but on becoming divine by worshiping properly.

The soul is presented by Augustine as the theatre where the transformative power of such attractive goods occurs. Religious symbols, as found in both scripture and in liturgy, are oriented toward and thus have value only as they are taken up and assimilated within the internal lives of God’s people. Drawn largely from the Neoplatonic tradition where sympathy explains the identification between knower and known, Augustine understood how created signs can transform. Revered images are singled out and explained, and then the faithful are exhorted to be identified with these things of God. In this way Augustine engages the range of human senses and draws on the attraction all people feel toward beauty in order to show his congregations how they must be toward God. It is a spiritual pedagogy aimed at the sanctification of the God’s people: Augustine invites us to see ourselves as living

42. *S.* 23B.3: “Quid ergo uolunt homines: dii fieri, an deos facere? . . . Deus enim fecit lignum, Deus fecit lapidem, aurum, argentum; tu ex illo lapide, quem fecit Deus, uis facere deum. Nec das illi quod tu fecisti, nec tollis illi quod ille fecit.”; *Augustin d’Hippone: Vingt-six Sermons au Peuple d’Afrique*, ed., François Dolbeau (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1996) 98.

43. *S.* 23B.5; Dolbeau, *Vingt-six Sermons*, 99.

44. *S.* 23B.15: “Oleum esto quod ab amurca intus separetur.”; Dolbeau, *Vingt-six Sermons*, 106.

from within the Christian story and not simply from without. For what is at stake here is nothing other than the transformation of one's internal narrative.

Such rhetoric and insistence on active participation presages the Second Vatican Council's invitation for the faithful to move from spectators to active participants in becoming more and more God's own. We read how the Church invites the faithful not simply to attend liturgy "as strangers or silent spectators" but "through a good understanding of the rites and prayers . . . they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all."⁴⁵ True worship brings the believer into living contact with God who uses liturgical signs to elevate creatures into union with himself.

In the preceding essay we have seen how religious symbols are used by Augustine to draw believers ever more intimately into the divine life. The liturgy thus becomes the *locus deificandi*, the place where the drama of human salvation is not only reenacted but effected. Surrounded by the temple of praise and all that is within, human persons are to see how God bids them to become his living signs. Gold, oil, trees, the altar of sacrifice, the Sabbath, and the laud Christians sing are all constituted to cultivate the full life of the baptized so as to draw them into a closer union with the divine, becoming gods by becoming God's.

45. Sacrosanctum Concilium §48.