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AUGUSTINE ON MARRIAGE, MONASTICISM, AND THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH

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[Editor's note: The author attempts to situate Augustine's theology of marriage in the broad historical and theological context of the early Church. She does so by connecting his view of marriage to his thinking on virginity and monastic life, and especially by integrating his views on all three states against the background of church preoccupations about the year 400. This more comprehensive account of Augustine's views draws upon the Confessions, On the Good of Marriage, On Holy Virginity, *and* On the Work of Monks.*]*

WHEN TODAY'S professional theologians find themselves turning to Augustine of Hippo, they do so most likely because he is a central figure in the history of Christianity. Whatever contemporary cause may have sufficiently captured their interest to point them back to Augustine, it is this central role which more often than not determines how he is remembered: as a Father of the Church and a saint. Yet this saintly image seems clearly at odds with how the historical Augustine regarded himself. For there can be little doubt that, if given the choice, he would have preferred the epithet of sinner to that of saint. For Augustine, sin is that which has stained the human race ever since Adam and Eve were forced to leave paradise. In fact, sin is what got them ejected in the first place. There is little need for further details, since nobody ever returned to paradise. Because it is thus a defining aspect of the human condition, the notion of sin naturally permeates all Augustine's theological statements. In his view, life on earth is marked by a tragic sense of falling short, expressed most poignantly by the inability of humans to be fully in touch with themselves, let alone with God. For a statement of this one does best to turn to the famous statement from the opening paragraph of the *Confessions,* "our heart is restless until it rests in you."[1]

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[1] *Confessions* 1.1. The critical text of the *Confessiones* (henceforth *Conf.*) is found in

The inability of the human heart at present to find rest in God is a fact of crucial theological importance because it colors how Augustine comes to interpret many symbols of the Christian faith. Whatever the specific aim of individual treatises, he is always ready to warn Christians against a false sense of complacency. Although Christians have direct access to divine revelation in Scripture which contains the record of how Christ preached salvation, for Augustine all human attempts to turn the word of God from thought into action are inevitably bound to fail. Its theoretical hold on perfection notwithstanding, it is as a practical religion that Christianity contains the principles of its own undoing. Thus one may summarize the status of Christians in society as "possessing everything, yet not having anything." For while it is indeed true that, in the gospel of Christ's Resurrection, Christians possess the highest good, it is no less true that what they collectively strive for—eternal rest in God—continues to elude them.

AUGUSTINE ON SIN AND SEXUALITY

If we step back from our reflections on sin as a general sense of human failure associated with Adam's exile from paradise, we can embark on an analysis of the *Confessions* as a text that contains the most intimate self-portrait of Augustine the sinner. We quickly notice how throughout his captivating autobiography Augustine evokes a suggestive link between the general experience of human life as sinful and his own personal experiences of sexual love. Thus in the *Confessions* he tells us that he was "in love with being in love." It is clear that his women partners are regarded more as objects of erotic passion than as persons whose self-worth needed to be treasured.[2] A similar conflicted attachment to, if not dependence on, physical and sexual love may also explain his reluctance to become a full-blown Manichee instead of a mere *auditor,* as the status of the elect required celibacy. He claimed sincerely to have loved his concubine, the mother of his son,

Confessionum libri XIII, ed. L. Verheijen, Corpus christianorum series latina 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981). In addition to the Latin chapters, I quote the page numbers from the translation by Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991). This study was delivered last year as my inaugural lecture at the University of Utrecht. An earlier version appeared as *Huwelijk en Ascese in de Vroege Kerk, met name bij Augustinus* (Utrecht, 1997).

[2] See *Conf.* 2.2.2: "Et quid erat, quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari?" In *Conf.* 3.1.1 the erotic tension increases, as Augustine connects his sexual passion with his inability to seek God: "I came to Carthage and all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves. As yet I had never been in love and I longed to love; and from a subconscious poverty of mind I hated the thought of being less inwardly destitute. I sought an object for my love; I was in love with love, and I hated safety and a path free of snares (Wisd. 14:11; Ps. 90:3). My hunger was internal, deprived of inward food, that is, of you yourself, my God. But that was not the kind of hunger I felt. I was without any desire for incorruptible nourishment, not because I was replete with it, but the emptier I was, the more unappetizing such food became . . . . To me it was sweet to love and to be loved, the more so if I could also enjoy the body of the beloved" (Chadwick 35).

Adeodatus, but he omitted her name altogether from his account. When he finally gave in to his mother's matchmaking and became engaged, he had no choice but to dismiss his former partner.[3] Still, his dependence on sexual relationships was such that he took up life with another concubine until his betrothed came of age.[4] Only after his conversion to Christianity did he feel either confident enough or sufficiently compelled to renounce his sexual activities once and for all.

If we read the narrative of the *Confessions* as I have just illustrated, emphasizing how Augustine seemed addicted to sexual love until his conversion to Christianity, we get the picture of a man unable to resist his physical impulses until his mind finally got the better of him.[5] It is tempting to accept such a hierarchy of soul over body, and Western theologians have often been culpable in this regard. Moreover, in the case of Augustine this scenario might even seem to apply. But does it really? In this article I want to advocate a different reading of the *Confessions.* In my opinion, Augustine does not mean to play up his sexual tensions in order to downplay the life of the body as inferior to that of the soul. This leaves undisputed that he may well have employed such a body-soul dualism during the writing of the Cassiciacum dialogues, that is, in his earlier Neoplatonic phase. In the *Confessions,* however, Augustine appears to recount his sexual experiences primarily because they allow him to sketch out the sinfulness of human nature as a deep-seated problem with ramifications both intimately personal and recognizably universal. The volatile complexity of human sexuality makes it eminently suitable to demonstrate the problem of sin as a permanent destabilizing human force.

Insofar as Augustine's deft use of sexual imagery can lead one easily to regard his life's story as a drawn-out conflict between physical/sexual sin and spiritual conversion, a problem of interpretation will always remain. It is important, therefore, not to obliterate the necessary nuances by suggesting too stark a contrast between sexual pollution and spiritual purity.[6] This is especially important since with literary skill Augustine tends to accentuate his sexual tensions in order

[3] In *Conf.* 4.2.2 Augustine describes their relationship, and in *Conf.* 6.15.25 he tells how her departure left his heart bleeding: "Meanwhile my sins multiplied. The woman with whom I habitually slept was torn away from my side because she was a hindrance to my marriage. My heart which was deeply attached was cut and wounded, and left a trail of blood" (Chadwick 109).

[4] In *Conf.* 6.15.25 Augustine says that he is "not a lover of marriage but a slave of lust" (Chadwick 109).

[5] Augustine recounts the moment of his conversion in 8.12.28. This moment is preceded by a conflict between habit (*consuetudo,* which is associated with sexual love) and continence, as Lady Continence *(casta dignitas continentiae)* reaches out to Augustine with semi-divine authority (see *Conf.* 8.11.26–27).

[6] In this respect it is important to note that the locus of the conflict between (sexual) habit and continence is Augustine's own heart, where both apparently have their natural place; see *Conf.* 8.11.27: "This debate in my heart was a struggle of myself against myself" (Chadwick 152).

to prepare his readers for the dramatic climax of his conversion. But to regard this divide as in any way permanent should be rejected in the case of this former Manichee. In addition, on a more practical level, this would have been totally unfitting for a prominent Christian like Augustine who had been made bishop a few years before. Instead, what is much more likely is that he seized on the volatile complexity of human sexuality because it provided him with a particularly apt lens through which to approach the contortions and distortions of human motivation. In brief, can we not look upon sexuality as a perfect mirror for the human self?

If this hypothesis has any plausibility, then it is important to regard Augustine's reflections on sexuality and sexual sin not as separate from his theological and doctrinal reflections, but rather as preceding them or perhaps even underlying them. But there is a more important consequence which interests me here. For if we accept the hypothesis that Augustine's own sexual reflections—whether to engage in sexual activity as he did in his early life, or to abstain from sex as he did after his conversion to Christianity and ordination as priest and bishop—are meant to give us a general view of human sinfulness, then their relevance is not restricted to a diagnosis of individual accomplishments or defeats. If Augustine recounts these experiences to point to a deeper, more general human vulnerability, we should be able to extrapolate from them to find out how he understands the role of the Christian community. It is for this reason that I chose to give my article the title that it bears.

In what follows I analyze how Augustine came to develop a particular model of the Church in which different modes of life—sexual activity and abstinence, marriage alongside virginity, and even monastic life—all have their specific place. I believe that Augustine's opinions are unique in the history of the early Church precisely because he does not feel compelled to set one off against the other in a stale hierarchy of lifestyles. Building on this insight, I attempt to demonstrate where Augustine's real contribution lies. By evaluating each lifestyle from the viewpoint of its strengths as well as its weaknesses, I aim to show how Augustine develops what is not only a synthetic, but a newly constructive vision of the Church as an earthly community called to holiness. His aim to integrate these widely diverging lifestyles leads him to value and define their total contribution to the life of the Church as a sinful, i.e. imperfect, community before judging the importance of any single lifestyle.

To put his views in perspective, I begin by discussing two views on marriage and virginity contemporary with Augustine's but substantially different from his, considering first Gregory of Nyssa's treatise on virginity (written in Asia Minor in the late 390s) and then John Cassian's *Conferences* regarding the role of the monastic life in the Church (written in Gaul around 425). Next I turn to the context associated with the year 400, approximately three years after Augustine

started to write his *Confessions,* in order to see what might have occasioned his specific interest in such themes. Finally, I discuss his *Rule,* which reflects his attempt to give the life of celibacy a meaningful role within the Church as a whole, and his tractate on the work of monks. By tackling the problem of human sexuality head on, more specifically by implementing a view of the Church that aims at uniting rather than dividing married people and virgins and/or monks, Augustine begins to transform what seemed a potential liability (sexuality as indicative of human sin) into a concrete asset (marriage and virginity as cornerstones of the Christian community). The analysis allows us to see how the former Manichee and present sinner is gradually transformed into an ecclesially astute bishop, if not yet a true saint of the Church.

GREGORY OF NYSSA ON MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY

To put Augustine's view of marriage in context, I shall briefly describe the view of one of his distinctive fourth-century contemporaries, Gregory, bishop of Nyssa and one of the so-called Cappadocian Fathers. The first treatise ever written by Gregory, who is probably best known for his Christian-Platonic mysticism, was a treatise on virginity.[7] He had been commissioned to write this work by his brother Basil, bishop of Caesarea.[8] Basil had decided to use the monastic ideal as a weapon against the Arians in the controversy that had erupted after the Council of Nicaea (325), but so far his strategy had yielded little success among his countrymen. Although Gregory meant to devote his treatise to the theme of virginity, it is significant that its opening chapters deal especially with marriage. Here we hit on a pivotal point: in many early-Christian writings on virginity, it seems as if the authors can only promote the ascetic lifestyle by contrasting it to married life. This contrast appears to have its historical origin in the fact that, by the fourth century, marriage was seen as an age-old Roman institution representing a universal norm, whereas virginity embodied a new and appealing, but still somewhat controversial Christian alternative. More important in Gregory's case than the problem of societal

[7] According to Michel Aubineau this work of Gregory's is to be dated around 371, but Peter Brown dates it between 370 and 379. For the text of Gregory's treatise, see M. Aubineau, ed., *Grégoire de Nysse: Traité de la virginité,* Sources chrétiennes 119 (Paris: Cerf, 1961). For an English translation, see V. Woods Callahan, trans., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1965) 6–75, esp. 12–20 (chap. 3). For the critical edition of *De virginitate* and *Vita S. Macrinae,* see W. Jaeger, ed., *Gregorii Nysseni Opera,* 8/1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952).

[8] For a new interpretation of Basil of Caesarea, see Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994) 1–26. Rousseau argues that, after some initial friction, Basil grew increasingly close to his siblings. The portrait he presents to his readers of a close-knit family jointly dedicated to the ascetic life reflects a well-thought out strategy to use his family relations in support of his orthodox agenda in the anti-Arian struggle.

status, is the question whether this contrast is merely a rhetorical strategy or whether it bespeaks a negative theology of Christian marriage.[9]

In his treatise on virginity Gregory argues that the ascetic life must be preferred to the married state, because only a life of virtue can elevate one above the fragility that characterizes married life.[10] (It is interesting to note that Gregory himself was in fact married to Theosebeia.) He movingly evokes all the mishaps that can befall married partners, and the picture he presents of marriage is bleak. He mentions as one possible danger that a man may lose his wife in childbirth. On the other hand, there is also the chance that a wife may lose her husband, who in fourth-century society would have been considerably older. In that case the young widow, left without guidance and direction, could easily become the target of vile gossip. Or she might rush headlong into an unhappy second marriage. Even if husband and wife both live to see their children start to grow up, there is always the danger that the children might not survive their first few years.[11] From statements such as these Peter Brown rightfully infers that Gregory ranks marriage beneath virginity, as the married state signals how humanity because of sin has been inflicted with a physical and mortal body. This may well be true, yet on a more basic level Gregory's remarks simply highlight the facts of married life in the context of the fourth century and beyond. Prior to any theological interpretation, is it not obvious that the emotional bond of marriage makes the partners twice as vulnerable, and that their frailty increases exponentially with the birth of each child?[12]

Though it is a fact (and one most convincingly argued by Brown) that Gregory places virginity over marriage because it avoids the dance with mortality that married partners engage in, I disagree with Brown's implication that Gregory's judgment on married life is ulti-

[9] For a lucid exposition of Gregory's view of marriage and virginity, see Peter R. L. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 1988) 285–304, esp. 293–98.

[10] It is important that in the introduction to *De virginitate* Gregory describes the ascetic life as a life of virtue rather than a celibate life (see SC 119, proëmium 1; Woods Callahan 6).

[11] See *De virginitate* 3 (Woods Callahan 12–20). While Brown emphasizes Gregory's Christian-Neoplatonic influence, Aubineau argues that this "strange" chapter bears above all the marks of rhetorical inspiration on the heels of the second sophistic movement (SC 119.45–46).

[12] Although Brown focuses on the connection between marriage and mortality, it appears Gregory considers virginity not so much a protection against death itself as against the wounding emotions that accompany the approach of death, such as fear and sadness. One may compare the signs of weakness Gregory shows at the deathbed of his sister Macrina, while she herself maintains a stoic composure, and his emotional release after her death. See Gregory's life of his sister Macrina, ed. P. Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Vie de Saint Macrine,* Sources chrétiennes 178 (Paris: Cerf, 1971) chaps. 17, 19, 22–23, 26–27; see also their conversation on her deathbed as found in *De anima et resurrectione dialogus,* PG 46.12–17.

mately negative. Brown seems to fix the parameters of the fourth-century theological debate too narrowly. This debate involved body *and* soul, incarnation *and* redemption, in a total package for which the life of virginity was ultimately deemed better suited because it offered a sharper focus on the resurrected life. Since the resurrected life would again be a total one, involving body and soul, a disapproving judgment of marriage as an institution would not further Gregory's cause. Thus his concrete criticisms must be explained differently. I would suggest that the association of married life with the experience of serious emotional pain was so natural for him that, as a trained rhetorician, he was simply unable to sing the praises of virginity without pointing out the problems of marriage at the same time.

Augustine encountered a very similar situation in the West around the year 400 when a controversy erupted regarding the ideal state of life befitting a Christian. But before addressing that, I wish to discuss another contemporary of Augustine who offers a different viewpoint. John Cassian, like Gregory, tended to see ascetic life as a remedy, but in his case, the ascetic life was a cure not for the fallen character of human nature but for the fallenness of the Church.

JOHN CASSIAN ON THE ROLE OF MONKS IN THE CHURCH

John Cassian's main achievement was helping to transfer monastic life from East to West. Although we have little information about his roots, it seems clear that by the year 415 Cassian, whose origins may well have been along the Black Sea, had settled in the south of France, where he founded two monasteries in the area around Marseilles. Like other defenders of the ascetic life in the same period, such as Sulpicius Severus and Jerome, he faced the difficult question of how to adapt the ascetic ideal, which apparently arose spontaneously in the deserts of Egypt, to the landscape of the West, while at the same time preserving its original identity. One of the problems Cassian attempted to solve was the contrast between the eremitical life, that is the life of isolated monks like Saint Antony, and the cenobitic or community life, whose main representative has traditionally been considered to be Pachomius.[13]

In his famous *Conferences,* which became standard reading in the monasteries of the Middle Ages since Benedict mentions them in his *Rule,* Cassian suggests a hierarchy in which the cenobitic life is ranked beneath that of the lone hermit. Yet he applies this hierarchy with some measure of flexibility, for at times he expresses a slight preference for life inside a community. The element of social pressure after all keeps monks alert, forcing them to execute their monastic duties with sufficient diligence and care. At other times, however, Cassian

[13] For a study of Cassian, see Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968), and especially Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1978) 79–95.

seems to regard the eremitical and cenobitical lifestyles not so much as constitutive of actually existing groups but as reflecting the consecutive spiritual stages of the individual monk's life. Still, when reading Cassian's *Conferences* one can hardly escape the impression that on the whole he favors the hermit over the monk who lives in community.[14] The question thus arises why this is the case.

As Robert Markus has argued, the reason may well lie in Cassian's larger view of the Church, which can be reconstructed from his various works. Cassian's model of the Christian community, like that of many early Christians including Augustine, was shaped by the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 4, where Luke comments on the life of the first congregation in Jerusalem. Entering a new phase after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, the Christians in the Jerusalem community were united by a unique and spontaneous bond of charity. Compared to those exhilarating times, the Church in Cassian's day found itself on the verge of a steep decline, as over time its original perfection had become eroded. Marked by a sense of community that was at best lukewarm, it seemed far removed from the ideal model. As a result, the story of the Church's apostolic formation took on the function of myth rather than history, for the contemporary Church no longer felt the urge to embody this ideal. For Cassian then, the question that came to drive his ascetic enterprise was how the monastic life could be of help in restoring the original sense of community, so as to show the world concretely what the Church looked like at its beginning. This is probably also the reason why he puts such emphasis on the need for rigorous discipline among his monks. The community of monks must make up in perfection what the world at large, even when fully Christianized, must always lack. Only by adhering to a strict disciplinary regimen can the Church hope to regain its apostolic perfection, even though the love it radiates will always be a faint semblance of the unique charity that characterized the original Jerusalem community.[15]

Since Cassian and his Western monks had no desert to which to

[14] See on this point especially Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church* 177–98. The text of the *Conlationes* can be found in E. Pichery, ed., *Jean Cassien: Les Conférences,* Sources chrétiennes 42, 54, 64 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1953, 1958, 1959). A complete annotated translation has just appeared by Boniface Ramsey, O.P., ed., *John Cassian: The Conferences,* Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York: Paulist, 1997); for a partial translation, see Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958) 183–289. Rousseau points to the *praefatio* of *Conl.* I (SC 42.75) for the view that the eremitic life is superior, while an example of the progression from cenobitic to eremitic life is found in the life of Paphnutius in *Conl.* 3.1 (SC 42.139–40). See also Cassian's interest in the monastic virtue of *discretio* in *Conl.* 1.23 (SC 42.107) and *Conl.* 2.2 (SC 42.112–4). Rousseau holds that from the third series of *Conlationes* Cassian advocates a more social ascetism; see *Conl.* 19 (SC 64.37 ff). In *Conl.* 19.16 (SC 64.54) Cassian says that human communities can be an effective remedy against vices: "For curing the faults which I have been talking about, human society, so far from being a hindrance, is beneficial" (Chadwick 288).

[15] For the contrast between Cassian's and Augustine's view on the monastic life, see

retreat, physical withdrawal from the world was not possible for them. Their separation, therefore, was not one of place but of spiritual attitude, as the desert gave way to the inner soul, the new laboratory of the monastic experiment. For this reason Cassian does not trust even monastic communities to reach apostolic perfection. There are simply too many seams that can unravel for any community to claim a tight seal on perfection. Only an individual soul can perhaps aspire to the perfection of the original desert monks, for whom perfection had become habit. It is not suprising that Cassian did not write a *Rule,* as Benedict did approximately a century later. Instead, he left us with a series of instructive dialogues, the so-called *Conferences,* in which an experienced senior ascetic mentors a younger colleague.[16]

However inspirational his goal, Cassian's view of the ascetic life remains a troubled one at best, marked as it is by a state of permanent confusion. Its integrity is compromised most of all by the author's contrived attempts to steer a middle course: between the Egyptian desert and the Western landscape, between the eremitical life and that of a monastic community, between a return to the spontaneous perfection of the apostles in the old Jerusalem and the artificial perfection commanded by a newly instituted set of harsh, rigorous principles. On a larger scale, however, this confusion may well be typical of the state of Western monasticism in the late-fourth and early-fifth century. When Augustine after his conversion decided to embrace celibacy, he came to face a very similar set of questions. Before discussing this, let us look more closely at the circumstances that led him to take a stand, one that would define the theological landscape for centuries.

AUGUSTINE'S DEVELOPMENT AROUND 400

The years around 400 marked a turbulent period for Augustine. He had more or less finished the *Confessions,* but he had also embarked on the composition of *On Christian Doctrine.* These two works are of singular importance not only in terms of success but also of content. In the *Confessions* Augustine chose to paint his own past as one of sexual license. In *On Christian Doctrine,* on the other hand, he was eager to try his hand at a theory of scriptural interpretation, since he would become more and more involved in the study of Scripture. In these same years marked by intense literary activity Augustine also made what was doubtlessly the most pivotal transition of his long career, surpassing in impact even his conversion, for from a newly baptized

especially Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990) 157–97.

[16] For the relation between the desert fathers and their students, see Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 26–87. Prior to his *Conlationes* Cassian wrote the so-called *Institutiones* in which he gave an interpretation of the communal life. Both works are dated around 425.

Christian he became a bishop, taking on grave leadership responsibilities.[17]

Because of his global and ecclesial outlook as bishop, Augustine may have felt compelled to intervene in the controversy that had erupted between Jovinian and Jerome. Centering around the role of virginity in the Christian Church, this controversy hit particularly close to home for Augustine, as the issue of celibacy had been a stumbling block in his own slow approach to Christianity. Now it came back to haunt him with full force, but this time he found himself on the other side of the fence. Whereas before he had done his utmost to resist the call to celibacy, now he felt compelled to defend and even promote it, though not without launching some serious attacks at the way in which many ascetics conducted themselves. What was the controversy and what were its implications?

Although the texts of Gregory of Nyssa and John Cassian have given us only a glimpse of the full spectrum of early Christian positions on the ascetic life, my point in reviewing them was to show that by Augustine's time virginity had become a serious rival to marriage as the prime model for Christian life. While much of the credit for placing virginity above marriage goes ultimately back to St. Paul and his famous statement that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9), it was not until the end of the fourth century that virginity became a prominent ideal. During the age of persecutions Christians were so clearly separated from their pagan counterparts that they did not need to emphasize their otherness through a special mode of life. They sometimes signaled their otherness through death, as the martyr's fate introduced them to eternal life in a baptism of blood. After the Constantinian turning point, however, the empire itself had become Christian, as a result of which a new contrast began to emerge: not between Christians and pagans (although that contrast would continue to exist for the time being) but between Christians and Christians. The distinction that became especially prevalent was that between the ascetic elite and the multitude of married Christians. Now that the prospect of a martyr's death could no longer unite Christians as potential victims, with earthly differences fading away before a common eschatological triumph, the difference between the ascetic elite and the flock of married persons appeared to threaten Christian

[17] After his baptism in 387 Augustine was ordained a priest in 391 and a bishop in 395. In a lecture at Harvard University on September 27, 1996, James O'Donnell suggested that from 391 to 397 Augustine suffered from so-called writer's block, experiencing considerable difficulty in creating a new "writerly persona" for himself as a cleric. For Augustine's activities as bishop, see the classic study by F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church,* trans. B. Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London and New York, 1961).

unity itself, and it left permanent marks on the fourth-century ecclesiastical landscape.[18]

To prevent this division from becoming unbridgeable, a certain Jovinian, himself a monk, advocated a remarkable position. He deemed the leading of an ascetic life ultimately as a supererogatory act, since baptism was the sole criterion by which one's Christian identity could be defined. Leading an ascetic life did not make one a superior Christian, but added to one's public commitment. Through his position Jovinian broke ranks with many early Christian theologians, most of whom were ascetics, who had come over time to define virginity/asceticism as closer to the state of paradisiacal purity. In doing so, however, they severely undermined the theological importance of marriage. We have already noted how difficult it was for Gregory of Nyssa to give a meaningful definition of virginity without indulging in a negative attack on marriage. To ward off Jovinian's attacks, Jerome rose to the defense of the ascetic life and its proponents. In typical fashion, Jerome did so with such aggressiveness that he completely demolished marriage in the process.[19]

At this point Augustine entered the debate. Contrary to Jerome, he held that it must be possible to answer Jovinian, that is to defend virginity, without denigrating marriage. In the year 401 one finds him writing two parallel works, a treatise entitled *On the Good of Marriage* and another *On Holy Virginity*. Later I shall explain Augustine's arguments in these two treatises to show how he compares marriage and virginity. In the years 400 and 401 Augustine also wrote a treatise *On the Work of Monks* in which he recommended that monks, like other Christians, should live by Paul's precept that "if any man will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Although in general this treatise has not been cited in this regard, I want to address it here as well.[20] My reason is that it also touches on the central relation of sin and sexuality, or conversely, on the relation of abstinence and sinless-

[18] See Brown, *Body and Society* 205-9, as he observes a similar discrepancy in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Demonstratio evangelica.*

[19] For the Jovinian controversy and Augustine's response, see especially Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity* 45–62. As Jerome wrote his *Ad Jovinianum,* Markus sees Augustine's *De bono conjugali* as a kind of *Ad Hieronymum* (45). See also Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988) 78–97, and Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993) 38–50.

[20] For *De bono conjugali* I have consulted the text with French translation from G. Combès, ed., *Oeuvres de saint Augustin 2. 1e série: Opuscules. II: Problèmes moraux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948). For text and French translation of *De sancta virginitate* and *De opere monachorum,* see J. Saint-Martin, ed., *Oeuvres de saint Augustin 3. 1e série: Opuscules. III: L'Ascétisme chrétien* (1938; 2nd ed., Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949). See further for the standard Latin edition of all three treatises Iosephus Zycha, ed., *Sancti Aureli Augustini Opera. Sect. 5,* Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 41 (Leipzig: Tempsky, 1900). English translations of *De bono conjugali* and *De sancta virginitate* can be found in *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects,* edited by Roy Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955) 9–51 and

ness. Some of the monks whom Augustine rebukes here at the request of Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, apparently considered their continence not just as elevating them above ordinary sinners but also as exempting them from St. Paul's injunction. As one might expect, Augustine vigorously denied that claim. Although *On the Work of Monks* appears to have been local in scope, and may well lack the substance of the treatises on marriage and virginity composed in those same years, it nevertheless points to an aspect of Augustine's celibate life that is often left out of the debate, namely that his life was mostly lived out in community. It is very likely that from 388 onward, before he became a priest and a bishop, Augustine lived inside a monastic community in his native Thagaste. Although the picture is not entirely clear after that time, it is probable that he continued some form of community living.[21] From this it can be inferred that Augustine was particularly aware of the responsibility of monastic communities vis-à-vis the larger church community. After the discussion of marriage and virginity, therefore, I analyze Augustine's position on monasticism and its meaning for the Church as it can be inferred not only from *On the Work of Monks,* but also from his famous *Rule* written a few years earlier in 397.[22] This allows us to relate his occasional admonitions to a band of renegade monks with his own structural insight into the monastic life as elaborated in his *Rule* that drew heavily upon his own experience.

Around the year 400, therefore, while he was more and more assuming the teaching authority of a bishop, Augustine became engaged in writing various disciplinary works, all of which touch in one way or another on the complex relationship between sin and sexuality. Since in the *Confessions* Augustine had made such eloquent use of his own sexual background to express the pervasiveness of human sin, our guiding question will be to see how these treatises concretely advance Augustine's thought. When called upon to defend virginity, how can he do so while avoiding the simple solution that celibacy makes one sinless? In placing virginity above marriage, how can he avoid indicting marriage as an institution infected by human corruption? When asked to rebuke idle monks, as the bishop meets the monk, how can he avoid discrediting the positive and collegial description of monastic life in his *Rule,* thereby sowing further discord in the Church?

143–212 For the English translation of *On the Work of Monks,* see *Saint Augustine Treatises on Various Subjects,* ed by Roy Deferrari (New York Fathers of the Church, 1952) 331–422

[21] For Augustine's view of monastic life and his own role in it, see George Lawless, O S A , *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* (Oxford Clarendon, 1987) 3–62, 155–61, Lawless calls Augustine, in the words of Andre Mandouze, "un moine malgre tout" (62)

[22] I have used the Latin text of the *Rule* with English translation found in Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* 65–118 For an English translation and commentary, see *The Rule of Saint Augustine Masculine and Feminine Versions,* with Introduction and Commentary by Tarsicius J van Bavel, O S A , trans R Canning, O S A (London Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984)

Before I attempt to answer these questions, a final comment is necessary. We have already noted that Augustine wrote all these works as a bishop. Thus he had become accustomed to teaching and preaching *ex cathedra,* and he had become increasingly involved in the study of Scripture. A deep scriptural foundation underlies many of his arguments. Scripture colors Augustine's theology and ecclesiology, as pieces of disciplinary writing become veritable tapestries of exegetical skill.[23] Thus to get at the heart of his position we must look not only to Augustine's strategies of persuasion, but also to his scriptural examples.

ON MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY[24]

Gregory of Nyssa's views in his treatise *On Virginity* were in large part inspired by his allegorical reading of the opening chapters of Genesis. According to his exegesis, humanity had lived in Eden, the state of paradisiacal bliss, until the fall. While in this blessed state, humans would have procreated like the angels, without sexual intercourse. After they forfeited their angelic nature at the fall, God designed in an act of grace to give them the possibility of physical procreation. In this way humanity could still arrive at the final number of souls, and God's

[23] For an example of his effective exegetical allusions, one may turn to *De sancta virg.* 56.57. Making a general reference to the fire of this world, Augustine quotes from the song of the three boys in the furnace who received coolness from him whom they loved with a most fervent heart (cf. Daniel 3:87). To an audience of virgins Augustine thus hints subtly that it is not the ascetic life as a human achievement that saves from the burning passion of sexual desire (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:9) but only God. In *De op. mon.* 27.35 Augustine also makes a passing reference to God's liberation of the three men. Although I cannot here elaborate on this, I would like to suggest that Augustine's so-called writer's block may have been due in part to the difficulties he encountered in trying to appropriate a new, exegetical-theological style of intellectual reasoning.

[24] I have a made a conscious choice to study marriage and virginity/asceticism in tandem through a synchronic approach to the years around 400. Thus I want to complement the recent trend to isolate certain Augustinian themes in order to study them in diachronic fashion. One may compare various studies along this line on Augustine's view of the body, his theology of marriage or his views of women. For Augustine on women, see Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (1968; repr. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), and Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York: Continuum, 1996). For Augustine on the body, see Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula: Scholar's, 1979). For Augustine on marriage, see Emile Schmitt, *Le mariage chrétien dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin: Une théologie baptismale de la vie conjugale* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1983); Philip L. Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) 241–311, and Elizabeth Clark, ed., *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996). In my opinion the evaluation of Augustine's views benefits from a more contextualized historical approach. In this case, this means one has to focus on how, as a new bishop, Augustine was especially interested in evaluating marriage and asceticism as regards their contribution to church and society. See also Brown, *Body and Society* 387–427. For an excellent systematic study of Augustine's thought, see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994) 92–147 and 203–55, esp. 246–52.

plan of salvation for the fullness of the human race would still be fulfilled. If Gregory seems at times to deprecate marriage, he does so largely because of the vulnerabilities to which married partners expose themselves. Underneath his criticism, he remains well aware that both marriage and physical procreation are signs of God's grace.

When Augustine set out to write his treatise on marriage, it was also to the story of paradise that his thoughts turned, but his preference was for a literal interpretation rather than an allegorical one. For Augustine, who had also embarked on his literal commentary on Genesis at this time, the paradise story marked the beginning of human history.[25] In paradise there had been a natural bond between the first man and the first woman. Thus there is a historic reason why contemporary society should treasure that bond and forge its relationships accordingly. But there is also a sociological dimension. The bond between the first couple was characterized by friendship which was closer and more intimate still because God had made woman out of man. Thus the two originated in one, as does all of society. Although Augustine briefly reflects on life in paradise without sin (whether the first couple would have had children through sexual intercourse), he quickly dismisses such questions as idle speculation.[26] While sin brought on humanity's present condition of birth and death, it is clear that for him the union of man and woman has always been a good thing. Furthermore, it is a good thing not only because of its expected result, progeny. For Augustine the bond of friendship underlying marriage overrides the importance of procreation. Thus in the case of elderly or sterile persons marriage remains equally valid.[27]

The picture that Augustine sketches shows Adam and Eve as two historical persons made from one, possessing a natural capacity for the good of friendship, a capacity all the closer because Eve was created out of Adam. Their union intensified because of their offspring, which

[25] The main text of this paragraph paraphrases *De bono conj.* 1.1: "Since every man is a part of the human race, and human nature is something social and possesses the capacity for friendship as a great and natural good, for this reason God wished to create all men from one, so that they might be held together in their society, not only by the similarity of race, but also by the bond of blood relationship. And so it is that the first natural tie of human society is man and wife. Even those God did not create separately and join them as if strangers, but He made the one from the other, indicating also the power of union in the side where she was drawn and formed. A consequence is the union of society in the children who are the only worthy fruit, not of the joining of male and female, but of sexual intercourse. For there could have been in both sexes, even without such intercourse, a kind of friendly and genuine union of the one ruling and the other obeying" (Deferrari 9).

[26] See *De bono conj.* 2.2.

[27] See *De bono conj.* 3.3: "This does not seem to me to be a good solely because of the procreation of children, but also because of the natural companionship between the two sexes" (Deferrari 12). Notice how in Augustine's mind *amicitia* (friendship) and *societas* (company, society) are closely related.

Augustine regarded as the only worthy fruit not of marriage, but of sexual intercourse. Augustine shows us a view of society united at its inception. Sin may have conditioned the way in which humans produce offspring, and through concupiscence it may have added an explosive element to the sexual relationship between the partners, but it cannot fundamentally undermine their bond of friendship. However, it is well to remember that for Augustine the friendship between man and woman involves a definite hierarchy in which one rules and the other obeys.[28]

Elsewhere in the same treatise Augustine describes the three goods of marriage: *fides, proles,* and *sacramentum.* While the first two, the loyalty between the partners and the begetting of offspring, are universally valid, the notion of *sacramentum* applies exclusively to Christians, as for them marriage is indissoluble.[29]

Still, Augustine's position on marriage is not wholly without contradictions. While he generally emphasizes friendship, he does at times say that "marriage itself among all races is for the one purpose of procreating children . . . so that they may be born properly and decently."[30] But in one instance, he says that not just marriage but even sexual intercourse takes place for the sake of friendship: "Surely we must see that God gives us some goods which are to be sought for their own sake, such as wisdom, health, friendship; others, which are necessary for something else, such as learning, food, drink, sleep, marriage, sexual intercourse. Certain of these are necessary for the sake of wisdom, such as learning; others for the sake of health, such as food

[28] See *De bono conj.* 1.1. In *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.5.9, Augustine elaborates on the hierarchy of man and woman as implied by the order of creation, whereby he emphasizes procreation at the expense of friendship; see Brown, *Body and Society* 399–403. I do not think that this change of opinion is the result of a negative evaluation of friendship with women on his part or a lack of personal experience (see Elizabeth A. Clark, " 'Adam's Only Companion': Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Recherches augustiniennes* 21 [1986] 157–58; Brown, *Body and Society* 402; Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church* 258); it is caused instead by his changed view of society. For the late Augustine the *pax cohabitantium* (peace of those who live together) is no longer an extension of the *ordo caritatis* (order of love; see *De bono conj.* 3.3) that binds man and woman, but is at permanent risk of derailment on account of their *contrariae voluntates* (opposing wills).

[29] See *De bono conj.* 24.32. In his interpretation of the sacramental character of marriage Augustine draws a parallel with the sacrament of ordination which remains valid even if a priest is removed from office. By doing so Augustine appears to lend this treatise not just an anti-Manichean but also an anti-Donatist character. For an anti-Donatist subtext of the *Confessiones,* see Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1992) 1–38.

[30] See *De bono conj.* 17.19: "Marriage itself among all races is for the one purpose of procreating children, whatever will be their station and character afterwards; marriage was instituted for this purpose, so that children might be born properly and decently" (Deferrari 33).

and drink and sleep; others for the sake of friendship, such as marriage or intercourse, for from this comes the propagation of the human race in which friendly association is a great good."[31]

These contradictions in Augustine's position go back in part to the position of St. Paul, whose statement that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9) was not exactly a ringing endorsement of marriage, thus setting in motion a whole series of problems regarding the interpretation of marriage in the Christian tradition. Yet they point above all to the difficult taxonomy which Augustine tries to sketch out for us. While marriage is seen as a good, virginity is still better.[32] Accordingly, marriage is contrasted positively with fornication and adultery or with concubinage, but negatively with continence, as a chaste marriage is undoubtedly better than one in which the partners are sexually active.

Still, Augustine goes to great lengths to clarify that virgins should not pride themselves on being superior to married people. They are not even better than the patriarchs, who engaged in polygamy. Although the chastity of continence is better than that of marriage, when one engages in a comparison of individuals he or she who possesses the greater good is better.[33] Therefore, if the virgins of Augustine's time consider themselves better than the patriarchs of old, they are dreadfully mistaken, for by disobedience and pride they show themselves far inferior to Abraham whose obedience was so great that he was willing even to sacrifice his only son.[34]

The ultimate reason why Augustine condones the polygamy of the patriarchs is that there was need at that time to populate the earth for Christ to be born among us. The patriarchs possessed continence as a habit only of the soul but not of the body, since they had not yet been

[31] See *De bono conj* 9 9 (Deferrari, 21–22) Elizabeth Clark observes that a close reading of this passage reveals that Augustine "means that a large population gained through reproduction will give more opportunity for friendship, rather than that sexual intercourse builds 'marital friendship,' as modern readers might conclude" (Clark, "Adam's Only Companion" 153) But Clark appears to disregard how in chap 1 1 Augustine established a direct link between the friendship (*amicitia*) of Adam and Eve in paradise and the societal bond between humans (*societas*) in his own days (see n 25 above), her remark further contradicts her earlier observation that in *De bono conj* and *De sancta virg* Augustine approaches marriage "from a non-reproductive viewpoint" (ibid 152)

[32] See *De bono conj* 8 8 "but marriage and continence are two goods, the second of which is better" (Deferrari 20)

[33] See *De bono conj* 23 28 "Therefore, if we compare the things themselves, in no way can it be doubted that the chastity of continence is better than the chastity of marriage Although both, indeed, are a good, when we compare the men, the one who has the greater good than the other is the better" (Deferrari 44–45) In 23 29 Augustine states that we should not compare individuals "in some one good " Sometimes one person possesses some good or a positive quality that the other lacks, but the other may well possess a different good

[34] See *De bono conj* 23 29, where Augustine ranks the *bonum obedientiae* above the *bonum continentiae,* and 23 30, where he calls obedience the mother of all virtues

requested to be continent.[35] But in Augustine's own days there is no longer need for procreation, because after Christ's birth and Resurrection all had been fulfilled. If there are no more marriages, then so much the better. It only means that Christ will come back sooner![36]

The argument that the need to marry and be married has ceased serves as a first indication that Augustine's thought is deeply influenced by eschatological motives. This explains also why he appeals to the New Testament and especially to St. Paul here rather than to Genesis and its creation stories or to the patriarchs. For Augustine, the ultimate importance of one's lifestyle depends on the contribution it makes to the City of God.[37] This same attitude also permeates *On Holy Virginity* (as well as *On the Work of Monks*) where he makes clear that continence is necessary for the kingdom of heaven and virginity is called the portion of angels.[38]

Since it is with an eye on the future, namely life in the City of God, that virginity gains importance, Augustine boldly relativizes its importance here on earth, even though he takes care not to undercut it completely. Thus he repeatedly stresses that virginity is of counsel, not precept.[39] In fact, he seems so eager to admonish the virgins that he almost changes the subject of his treatise; its second half could well be entitled "on pride and humility."[40] Again, his eschatological outlook is responsible for this, because in his judgment martyrs still rank higher than virgins. But martyrdom is a hidden gift, since one cannot know whether one will be chosen to sacrifice one's life until the moment has

[35] See *De bono conj.* 21.25. Augustine says that not even Christ had perfect continence of body, but of course he did have continence of soul. In contrast to John the Baptist, for example, he did not abstain from food and drink (21.26).

[36] See *De bono conj.* 9.9: "In this regard it is gathered that in the earliest times of the human race, especially to propagate the people of God, through whom the Prince and Savior of all peoples might both be prophesied and be born, the saints were obliged to make use of this good of marriage, to be sought not for its own sake but as necessary for something else. But now, since the opportunity for spiritual relationship abounds on all sides and for all peoples for entering into a holy and pure association, even they who wish to contract marriage only to have children are to be admonished that they practice the greater good of continence" (Deferrari 22). Elsewhere in the work Augustine makes similar remarks: "Non est enim nunc propagandi necessitas, quae tunc fuit" (15.17); "Nec prolem autem carnalem jam hoc tempore quaerere . . . . melius est utique et sanctius" (24.32).

[37] On this point my interpretation differs from that put forth by Pagels and Elliott. Although they are sensitive to the element of projection in Augustine's view of the City of God, they see it as a temporal or political instead of an eschatological one; see Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* 98–126, and Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage* 43–50. Augustine refers to the City of God in *De bono conj.* 15.17, and especially in 18.21 (with reference to Acts 4): "una civitas futura est habentium animam unam et cor unum in Deum."

[38] See *De sancta virg.* 13.12: "angelica portio."

[39] See 1 Corinthians 7:25, cited, e.g., in *De bono conj.* 23.30 and *De sancta virg.* 13.13. In *De sancta virg.* 15.15 Augustine uses this same motto to interpret Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:27 that it is better not to remarry when one is widowed.

[40] In *De sancta virg.* 31.31 Augustine wants to speak not only about "gloriossissima castitas" but also about "tutissima humilitas."

arrived. As long as the married can become martyrs, however, virgins are wrong to pride themselves on their chastity as a superior state.[41] Moreover, from the fact that virgins need to recite the Lord's Prayer, it can also be inferred that they are not totally free from sin.[42]

What is to be gained by remaining a virgin? Augustine devotes some of the most beautiful passages in his treatise on virginity (chaps. 27 to 29) to answering that question. Virgins can go where married persons cannot go; they can imitate Christ as the Son of Man in the flesh as well as in the heart. But in accordance with his own balanced taxonomy, themes such as the imitation of Christ apply also to married people. Still, a crucial difference remains. As Augustine states so eloquently, the married can walk the same paths, even though they cannot set their feet perfectly in the same print.[43]

In regard to virgins and married persons in the Church, Augustine seems confident that when the multitude of the faithful sees these modest virgins, it will ultimately rejoice in and with them. Thus his view of the unity of married persons and virgins is one of difference with concord, of a variety which is harmonious.[44] In this Augustine successfully refines the thought of both Gregory of Nyssa for whom virginity was to be preferred because it shut out the pains of marriage, and of Jerome who regarded marriage as crudely inferior to virginity.

ON THE ROLE OF MONKS IN THE CHURCH

We have seen how Augustine integrated marriage and virginity by elevating both to a higher use in relation to the kingdom of heaven, or the City of God. But what about life in a monastic community? Does he have reason to esteem monastic life above that of his married flock? In his treatise *On the Work of Monks* Augustine strikes a tone that is very similar to that of *On Holy Virginity.* He admonishes the monks and wants to teach them humility. He does so primarily by emphasizing that the apostolic precept holds for them also: whoever does not work shall not eat. While stressing the familiar point that monastic life is for the kingdom of heaven, he makes clear that it is not up to us humans to decide when we have arrived there.

The treatise *On the Work of Monks* is especially interesting because of the clever arguments by which Augustine debunks false eschatologi-

[41] See *De sancta virg.* 46.47. [42] See *De sancta virg.* 48.48.

[43] See especially *De sancta virg.* 27.27: "The delight of the virgins of Christ, from Christ, in Christ, with Christ, after Christ, through Christ, because of Christ. The special delights of the virgins of Christ are not the same as those of non-virgins, although these be Christ's" (Deferrari 174). Here one encounters a new distinction between marriage and virginity, i.e., that between *uti* and *frui* which is so familiar from *De doctrina christiana.* Whereas in *De bono conj.* 20.24 Augustine speaks about the use (*usus*) of marriage, it appears he sees virginity only as directly leading to the enjoyment (*gaudium;* cf. *frui*) of Christ.

[44] See *De sancta virg.* 29.29: "For, where there is no envy, variety is harmonious" (Deferrari 177).

cal motives put forth by idle monks. Apparently they refuse to work because they already deem themselves inhabitants of the City of God. In support of their position they quote the saying of Matthew 6:25–34 about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air who do not worry about their supplies but trust the heavenly father to feed them.[45] Contrary to what one might expect, Augustine is eager to ridicule this position as he directs the monks back to earthly reality. They may not work themselves, like the birds of the air, but how then do they expect to eat? Will they go into the fields of others to do so, as do the birds? And why do they wear their hair long? Do they not want barbers to work either, or do they expect to be plucked, like the birds?[46] Augustine believes that saying prayers, singing Psalms, and reading the Word of God do not quite fill up the monk's day.[47] Monks also need to work so as not to isolate themselves too much from the multitude of Christians. Besides, they can sing the Psalms while they work, a recommendation which puts Augustine in touch with the Pachomian tradition.[48] Yet if they do work, it remains true that God cares for them just as he does for the birds of the air.[49] On a surprisingly personal note Augustine confides that he would much prefer monastic chores over his episcopal duties that included involvement in many juridical and administrative matters such as the arbitration of lawsuits.[50]

This personal note expressing his attachment to the monastic life allows us to get a better view of what he regards as its main goals. To get a concrete indication, we can also look to the *Rule* he had written just a few years earlier (ca. 397). If we compare Augustine's stand on the monastic life with that of Cassian who was so thoroughly influenced by the mentality of the desert, it is striking that his focus is not on the monk's lack of perfection, but on the community's love and concord. What is central in the functioning of a monastic community is that its members are of one mind and heart. It is this concord from which all other tasks of monastic life follow, be it common sharing of all things, relinquishing personal property, or persevering in prayer. While Cassian valued community primarily because of the social pressures that would force the monk to work on his personal perfection, Augustine considers the community rather than the individual soul the perfect locus for attaining a life of charity guided by unity of heart.[51] Thus he focuses on the responsibility that individual monks have for each other in a community. Even the monks' attitude toward

[45] See *De op. mon.* 1.2.

[46] See *De op. mon.* 31.39 and 23.28–29.

[47] See *De op. mon.* 17.20.

[48] According to Rousseau, Pachomius does not want the monks to interrupt their work during the synaxis; see Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985) 80.

[49] See *De op. mon.* 26.35.

[50] See *De op. mon.* 29.37.

[51] See *Regula sancti Augustini* 1.8: "Live then, all of you, in harmony and concord; honor God mutually in each other; you have become his temples" (Lawless 83).

their superior (who is mentioned only in the penultimate chapter) should be one of love rather than fear.[52]

Unity, friendship, and concord mark a monastic community, as it tries to relive the experience of the first apostolic community in Jerusalem. With statements like these we are far from the ladder toward perfection that Cassian offered us. The risk of falling down is simply too great for Augustine. What use is it to climb in isolation toward perfection, as in the case of Cassian's hermits? As recent disasters on Mt. Everest have shown, the joy of the few who triumph cannot make up for the loss of the many who tumble, and in their fall may take others down with them. Monastic life for Augustine, unlike for Cassian, is not a remedy for the ills of the Church in the world, for, as *On the Work of Monks* shows, monastic communities experience many of the same ills. If monastic life is at all successful in giving us a greater share in the life of charity that so characterized the first community in Jerusalem, its primary purpose should not be to correct others but to teach them how to live a life of charity.

CONCLUSION: SIN, SEXUALITY, AND SANCTITY

If one accepts that in his *Confessions* Augustine establishes a close connection between the sinful condition of humanity and his own sexual experiences, then the works which he contemporaneously wrote on marriage, virginity, and the monastic life are given new meaning. In contrast to the autobiographical nature of the *Confessions,* he focuses in these works on how the relationship between sin and sexuality can be redirected so as to add to the sanctity of the Church. With this in mind I wish to draw from my analysis some tentative conclusions.

Although at the time he wrote *On the Good of Marriage* and *On Holy Virginity* Augustine had not yet completed his literal reevaluation of the book of Genesis (especially the role of the fall), it is clear that the connection of marriage with sexual intercourse and procreation does not invalidate it as an institution for him. Rather, the fact that through marriage the partners' sexual impulses can be channeled to enhance the unity of the human race by producing children adds to the dignity of the institution, which was a fixture both of Roman and of Old Testament law. Yet the single most striking feature of Augustine's view of marriage is his stress on the friendship which marriage promotes.

According to Augustine, marriage is a good, but virginity is better. Yet unlike Jerome, Augustine does not laud virginity at the expense of marriage. Virgins should above all take care to exercise humility. A humble married woman is better than a proud virgin. Moreover, because married persons can receive the hidden gift of martyrdom which he places above virginity, it is not true under all circumstances that

[52] See *Regula* 7.3: "He shall willingly embrace discipline and instil fear. While both are necessary, he shall strive, nevertheless, to be loved by you rather than feared, mindful always that he will be accountable to God for you" (Lawless 101).

virginity is better than marriage. What is most important, however, is that the relationship between virgins and married persons should be one of harmonious variation. This notion of harmonious variation or difference with concord, allows Augustine to avoid the simple conclusion that abstinence equals sinlessness, or conversely that intercourse implies sin. After all, intercourse can be used for friendship, while abstinence can lead to misplaced pride. Because for Augustine right order will always involve hierarchy, virginity remains superior to marriage. When stressing the importance of friendship in marriage, Augustine likewise maintains that man rules and woman obeys. Still, the crucial point is that in both cases he stresses the need for a hierarchy without envy, a difference with concord.

Harmonious variation ought also to characterize the relation between monks and the Christian community at large. Monks have the special task of representing the practice of the first community in Jerusalem, something that should ultimately inspire all Christians. What else is the City of God than a reawakening of that glorious Jerusalem with all its prophets, apostles, and martyrs? Just as virgins should not be proud, so monks should not be lazy; the unity of their hearts and minds should be expressed in the activity of their hands. The responsibility brothers or sisters have for each other according to the *Rule* must be replicated on a larger scale in the responsibility all Christians have for their neighbors.

To summarize my conclusions, I refer to another quote from St. Paul which Augustine cites in *On the Work of Monks* (25.32), where he characterizes monastic life as "having nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). This text could well serve as the motto of all Christians, the married, virgins, and monks alike, who with Augustine are on pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem. Their status in life counts only inasmuch as it helps them to make progress on their journey. It should not be counted as their personal achievement or property, for "there is one commonwealth of all Christians."[53]

When writing on marriage, virginity, and the monastic life, Augustine had the eschatological unity of this commonwealth very much in mind. With an eye on this Christian commonwealth, the same person who as an adolescent was so in love with being in love was now able to broaden his personal experience of sexual activity and abstinence into a workable picture for the Church of his time, including all and excluding none. If we accept the fact that in Augustine sexuality functions as an expression of the universality of human sin, then his pastoral prudence in dealing with such matters as marriage, virginity, and monasticism shows us even today how the sinner can become a saint.

[53] See *De op. mon.* 25.33: "Nor must attention be paid to which monasteries or in what place the rich man has given to the needy brethren that which he possessed, for there is one commonwealth of all Christians" (Deferrari 378). But notice Rist's comment that Augustine has the tendency "to confuse the ideal with the actual" (*Augustine* 253).