

Rhetoric and Reality: Augustine and Pope Francis on Preaching Christ and the Poor

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Kevin Grove, CSC 
University of Notre Dame, IN, USA

Abstract

In an age when rhetoric about alleviating conditions of poverty is rightly suspect, this study offers a reassessment of the power of non-modern, christological rhetoric through parallel examples of the preaching of Augustine and Pope Francis. Demonstrating how both practice a version of *prosopopeia*, this study shows how Augustine’s “exchange” and Francis’s “encounter” function as performative Christologies by which rhetoric is meant to effect reality concerning the poor. The study suggests revision of binary formulations of the relation of rhetoric to reality and proposes a non-binary, incarnational method.

Keywords

Augustine, Christology, encounter, exchange, Pope Francis, poor, poverty, preaching, rhetoric

Could it be that Francis’s rhetoric of a poor church for the poor is disconnected in actuality from the reality of the poor? That is the claim of economist Robert Murphy and others who assert that Pope Francis is simply mistaken about the reality of the world’s poor and his desire to help the poor is a good theological intention

Corresponding author:

Kevin Grove, CSC, University of Notre Dame, 130 Malloy Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.
Email: kgrove1@nd.edu

undermined by scientific economic ignorance.¹ Murphy claims that the church teaches people the ends to pursue as inspired by Jesus, but it is economists who should deliver the best means of achieving them.² These objections to Francis are about more than disagreements on the virtues and vices of the market economy. At stake is the question of the extent to which rhetoric about Christ and the poor—including the Gospel itself—is relevant to, or even governed by, modern daily economic realities.

Even beyond his critics in economic circles, Francis's rhetoric—from his first rhetorical act of choosing the name of the patron saint of the poor—has left theologians, scholars of rhetoric, and popular commentators alike struggling to systematize and come to terms with his speech. His sermons, addresses, seemingly off-the-cuff remarks, and even exhortations do not conform to the models of his immediate predecessors.³ Scholars have suggested labels for Francis's rhetoric ranging from “nonmodern religious” to “common sense.”⁴ Across interpreters, however, one frequently can observe that they assume a split between rhetoric and reality—from Francis's early and repeated pining for a poor church for the poor to the actual economic policies for which his writings have been interpreted to advocate.⁵ As I will discuss later, Francis's own *Evangelii Gaudium* invites a modified form of this rhetoric–reality binary.⁶ This binary approach

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1. Robert Murphy, “Pope Francis has it wrong on global poverty and its cure,” *Washington Examiner*, February 28, 2018, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/pope-francis-has-it-wrong-on-global-poverty-and-its-cure>.
 2. Robert Murphy, “Conclusion,” in *Pope Francis and the Caring Society*, ed. Robert Whaples (Oakland: Independent Institute, 2017), 199–220 at 201. Murphy is joined by a number of other essayists, theological and economic, who are critical of Francis's understanding of the market economy and concerned about the intersection of the voices of the church and the market.
 3. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, in presenting the distinctive rhetoric of Pope Francis after the first nine months of his papacy, rightly suggested beginning analysis of the pope's rhetoric from his name. “Reflections on Pope Francis: Is he Reformer, Traditionalist, or Both?” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 42 (2014): 59–64 at 59–60.
 4. Paul Lynch, “On Care for Our Common Discourse: Pope Francis's Nonmodern Epideictic,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 47 (2017): 463–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2017.1347953>; and Joseph Zoppetti, “*Gaudium et Oeconomica Aequalitas*: Pope Francis's Rhetoric of a Poor Church for the Poor,” *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 13 (2017): 293–301, https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.13.3.293_7.
 5. In rhetoric, Paul Lynch, “The Attractions of Imperfection: Pope Francis' Undisciplined Rhetoric,” *Present Tense Journal* 5 (2015): 1–5. In American cultural reception these questions often spring from concerns about whether or not the pope misrepresents the reality of global capitalism's role in wealth creation. See, for instance, John Cassidy, “Pope Francis's Challenge to Global Capitalism,” *The New Yorker*, December 2, 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/pope-franciss-challenge-to-global-capitalism>. The issue is theologically treated by David Cloutier, Charles Clark, Mary Hirschfeld, and Matthew Schadle in “Pope Francis and American Economics,” *Horizons* 42 (2015): 122–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2015.47>.
 6. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 231–33, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).

has rendered those who interpret Francis as excavators, digging beneath the rhetoric, trying to state plainly what John Allen, Jr., has termed “strategy underneath the rhetoric.”⁷ These methods continually reinscribe the assumption that Francis may not really intend what his rhetoric implies. In the end, they reveal a theological problem of the very relevance of the church’s and the Gospels’ rhetoric on poverty.

Francis is hardly unique in receiving criticism for the way in which he employs christological rhetoric about the poor and its seeming disconnect from reality. Recent scholarship has equally questioned the rhetoric of Augustine of Hippo. Both patristic and Catholic social teaching scholars have collaborated to come to grips with the dearth of evidence in the fifth-century exegete’s volumes of sermons about the actual, material conditions of the poor in his midst.⁸ Pauline Allen and Edward Morgan introduced to scholarship a binary split, which they call “rhetoric versus reality,” a disjunction between the dramatic social inversion that Augustine preached and the lack of actual descriptions of the conditions of the lives of the poor.⁹ The rhetorical examples of the former are extensive; the instances of the latter are few, thus leading scholars to wonder whether the reality of the poor is cloaked, veiled, or simply not as great a concern as Augustine’s rhetoric implies.¹⁰

The problem with binary approaches—what Allen and Morgan call “rhetoric versus reality”—to both Augustine and Pope Francis, as I will argue, is that in attempting to fight through the rhetoric to get to the reality of the poor, scholars miss a theological program moving in the opposite direction. Such approaches fail to appreciate the christological transfiguration in this rhetoric by which individuals and communities are so identified with the person of Christ that they are reshaped into that reality. To this end, a renewed understanding of Augustine’s rhetoric about the poor, and particularly its christological pivot, provides not only insight into Francis’s approach, but also strengthens the case for why christological rhetoric must needs be at the heart of the creation of economic realities on a daily basis.

Initially it might seem odd to pair Francis and Augustine. Benedict XVI was the Augustine scholar as well as the high watermark for frequency and contextual accuracy in magisterial citation of patristic sources.¹¹ Francis’s citation patterns have

7. John Allen, Jr., “Yes, Virginia, Pope Francis has a strategy underneath the rhetoric,” *Crux*, July 11, 2015, <https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/07/11/pope-francis-has-a-strategy-underneath-the-rhetoric/>.

8. Pauline Allen, “The Challenges in Approaching Patristic Texts from the Perspective of Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching,” in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought*, eds. Johan Leemans, Brian Matz, and Johan Verstraeten (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011), 30–42.

9. Pauline Allen and Edward Morgan, “Augustine on Poverty,” in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, eds. Pauline Allen, Bronwen Neil, and Wendy Mayer (Leipzig: Evangelische, 2009), 150–62.

10. Allen and Morgan, “Augustine on Poverty,” 161.

11. For detailed analysis, see Brian Matz, *Patristic Sources and Catholic Social Teaching: A Forgotten Dimension* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 121–41.

included added frequency of other sources of tradition such as global episcopal conferences. It is not citation that links Francis and Augustine, but rather their preaching.¹² For both figures, the theology of their preaching is often understudied because it can be difficult to systematize. Yet, when preaching about Christ and the poor, their rhetoric—for Augustine I call it exchange, and for Francis encounter—reveals striking similarities in approach. Taken together, they provide a unique opportunity to reassess the theological consequences of the rhetoric and reality binary through the test case of preaching on Christ and the poor.

The sources for this investigation are sermons. The rhetorical structures of both Augustine's and Francis's homilies show that preached theological discourse is indeed primary theology, and rhetoric is one bearer of that thinking. I consider here Francis's preaching from his becoming pope in March 2013 through July 2018, focusing explicitly on those public sermons for which texts are available.¹³ Of central importance for Augustine are his *Expositions of the Psalms*—his longest work both in length and number of years to complete, replete with considerations of Christ and the poor on account of the density of poverty language in the psalter. Both Augustine and Francis use a mode of rhetoric broadly called epideictic, which can strike the contemporary ear—expecting deliberative or legislative ecclesial rhetoric—as unusual.¹⁴ Epideictic rhetoric, as John O'Malley defines it, is a panegyric that heightens “appreciation for a person, an event, or an institution and [excites] emulation of an ideal.”¹⁵ Within that umbrella, this article shows use of a particular device—*prosopopeia*, or personification—by which both Augustine and Francis are able to take up the personages of their congregations, the Body of Christ, the poor, and even the saints. The power of this tool is well attested as early as the classical rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian, who explained that *prosopopeia* could bring down opponents, or bring to light the voices of individuals, peoples, and states.¹⁶ Quintilian even suggested it could raise the

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12. Scholars have identified Augustinian moments in Francis's own theological development. Massimo Borghesi and Rafael Luciani independently show how Francis has received Augustinian ideas, following interpretive lines from thinkers like Przywara and Ratzinger in order to consider the love of the intertwined earthly and heavenly cities and inform his own theology of the people. See Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2017), 36–44; and Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 103–29.
 13. Though I reference on two occasions daily sermons from Casa Santa Marta, these daily sermons are most frequently available only as summaries (*Vatican News* and *L'Osservatore Romano*) with select quotations and thus not helpful sources for rhetorical analysis.
 14. Lynch, “Pope Francis's Nonmodern Epideictic,” 470.
 15. O'Malley connects epideictic rhetoric and the Second Vatican Council. *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap 2010), 47–48; James Bretzke applies it to Pope Francis: “The Francis Effect on the *Mumus Docendi* and *Gubernandi* of the Church,” *Horizons* 42 (2015): 374–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2015.105>.
 16. Cicero, *Orator* 25.85–87; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.29–31.

dead.¹⁷ Looking at this rhetorical device reveals the theological substructure of Augustine's rhetoric of exchange and Francis's rhetoric of encounter. It offers a theological challenge to the rhetoric versus reality binary as it is currently applied to studies of their preaching.

Looking at this rhetorical device reveals the theological substructure of Augustine's rhetoric of exchange and Francis's rhetoric of encounter. The heart of this theological issue is soteriological semiotics. I will suggest that not only are Augustine and Francis aware of the distance between their rhetoric and reality, but also that they consciously use christological rhetoric to subvert and transfigure that reality. Their approach, which is suggestive of an incarnational understanding of rhetoric, accomplishes two things: First it delivers scholarship from a too rigid "rhetoric versus reality" binary, which at its worst, reduces theological research to fact-checking rhetoric assumed to be untrustworthy. Second, it opens constructive theological pathways for considering how incarnational rhetoric might shape and alter the realities, economic and beyond, into which it is spoken.

"Augustine is no Oscar Romero" and "Francis is no economist": Rhetoric and Reality as Method

Secondary scholars of both Augustine and Francis refer to rhetoric and reality as in competitive relationship. Concerning both thinkers, this is a binary which has emerged from legitimate scholarly concerns, not only about preached rhetoric but also about christological rhetoric.

Augustine

In their 2009 essay on Augustine's preaching and the poor, patristic scholars Pauline Allen and Edward Morgan express one of the difficulties involved in mining patristic preaching to reconstruct early Christian social doctrines. Their claim, in its strongest form, is that "Augustine is no Oscar Romero, and nothing in his thought suggests that he envisaged the political or social inversion to the extent that his rhetoric, if taken literally, would suggest."¹⁸ Allen and Morgan are but part of a growing interest in the early church and poverty. In patristic poverty studies, Peter Brown has perhaps singularly opened up understanding of poverty as a spiritual category in Northern Africa and ancient Christianity around the Mediterranean.¹⁹ Additionally, thinkers like Allen, Morgan, Richard Finn, and Alan Fitzgerald have investigated not only the spiritual category of poverty but also what can be known of the conditions of the poor as

17. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.31.

18. Allen and Morgan, "Augustine on Poverty," 161.

19. Peter Brown, "Augustine and a Crisis of Wealth in Late Antiquity," *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005): 5–30; and *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2012).

revealed through topics like almsgiving.²⁰ Troublingly, scholars have not found frequent descriptions of poor persons such that they could chart improved social conditions. Almsgiving is frequently described as a transaction between the one giving and Christ. Figurative exegetes like Augustine—John Chrysostom and Origen can be alleged of the same—mark Christ as poor, the church as a beggar, and richness as correlated to heaven. Impoverished figures from Scripture like Lazarus are the subject of scrutinizing study. Yet, largely lacking are descriptions of the poor who might have been either within the congregation or immediately outside the basilica walls where this exegesis was being carried out.

Scholars have rightly looked to rhetoric for answers. As early as 1982, Boniface Ramsey controversially claimed that identifications of Christ with the poor in Latin Christianity of the fifth century “tended to work against the poor by swallowing them up” in Christ.²¹ While the identification of Christ and the poor is what makes almsgiving a spiritual action, Ramsey suggested that an overemphasis on the universal over the individual yielded a sort of “social monophysitism that failed to give recognition to the individual nature of the poor over against Christ.”²² In Ramsey’s assessment, the Church Fathers, and Augustine in particular, exaggerated a christological theme to yield the practical consequence of increased almsgiving.²³ Ramsey’s claim set off a debate that has continued to the present.²⁴ Reflecting on Ramsey and others, Allen and Neil, for instance, claim that one of Augustine’s strategies to “goad” his congregations into almsgiving was to identify the poor with Christ. They write that while identifying Christ and the poor is “a powerful theological construct, it can legitimately be asked whether it runs the risk of subsuming the poor into Christ and thus depersonalizing them even further than they are in much patristic discourse.”²⁵

Emergent in this debate is a method of assessing Augustine’s rhetoric. In these instances christological rhetoric subsumes, conceals, or diminishes the reality of the

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20. Especially: Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313–450)* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006); and Alan Fitzgerald, “Almsgiving in the Works of St. Augustine,” in *Signum Pietatis: Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA zum 60.*, ed. A. Zumkeller (Würzburg: Augustinus, 1989), 445–59.
 21. Boniface Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries,” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226–59 at 253, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398204300202>.
 22. Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church,” 253.
 23. Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church,” 259.
 24. In addition to nn.1, 2, and 18, see Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbor in St. Augustine* (Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993), 394–96; and Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, “Discourses on the Poor in the Psalms: Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos*,” in *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice*, eds. A. Andreopoulos, A. Casiday, and C. Harrison (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 181–204. Earlier treatments of the issue include John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine: The Hulsean Lectures for 1938* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 132–35.
 25. Allen and Neil, “Discourses on the Poor,” 193.

poor. Rhetoric may function to goad the rich unto the good, but only by theological exaggeration. Rhetoric, especially about Christ, at best obscures reality and at worst subsumes the weakest ones it is meant to serve.

The result has been frustration with patristic rhetoric from collaborating researchers in other theological subdisciplines. Between 2005 and 2009, the Centre for Catholic Social Thought and the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Leuven carried out an investigative project concerning the intersection of Catholic social thought and patristic preaching. Richard Schenk, Johan Leemans, and Johann Verstraeten all provided summary reflections on the difficulty of this collaboration in their conference volume.²⁶ At the end, it was nearly insurmountable for Catholic social teaching scholars to benefit from the complex and difficult-to-translate world of patristic texts without using texts as sound-bites. Yet, the scholars also concluded that defaulting to a world in front of the text, in a nod to Paul Ricoeur, was equally problematic.²⁷ Johann Verstraeten hoped that a “text-oriented, complex hermeneutics” might emerge that would allow “use” of patristic texts in the present without simple and superficial transposition of old texts into the present.²⁸ But, at the end of their striving, such a hermeneutic remained elusive. Rhetoric remains in a tenuous relation to the social reality of the patristic era. As a consequence, patristic rhetoric is even harder to relate to the social realities of the present.

Francis

In both anticipation and reception of his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG*), commentators split along political and ecclesial divisions either to affirm or to castigate the way in which Francis’s rhetoric did or did not match reality. The headlines were bold. At *Forbes Magazine*, Bill Frezza’s headline began “Francis is no economist” and went on to explain that the pope’s rhetoric bit the invisible hand that has fed more people than the Vatican ever will.²⁹ Michael Novak approached rhetoric by circumscribing reality, suggesting that Francis’s rhetoric only really maps onto an Argentinian reality.³⁰ Others have made repeated efforts at labeling the pope’s rhetoric. Rusty Reno, in *First Things* and in *America*, describes Pope Francis’s rhetoric in almost entirely negative terms suggesting that it does not cohere with reality:

26. Richard Schenk, “The Church Fathers and Catholic Social Thought,” in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics*, 209–21; and Johan Leemans and Johan Verstraeten, “The (Im)possible Dialogue between Patristics and Catholic Social Thought,” in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics*, 222–31.

27. Schenk, “The Church Fathers and Catholic Social Thought,” 215–20.

28. Leemans and Verstraeten, “The (Im)possible Dialogue,” 231.

29. Bill Frezza, “Pope Francis is no economist,” *Forbes Magazine*, December 3, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrezza/2013/12/03/pope-francis-is-no-economist>.

30. Michael Novak, “Agreeing with Pope Francis,” *The National Review*, December 7, 2013, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2013/12/agreeing-pope-francis-michael-novak>.

rhetorical exaggerations,³¹ rhetorical extremism,³² exaggerated and divisive rhetoric (though biblically sourced),³³ and that Francis shares with Donald Trump a penchant for rhetorical overreach.³⁴ Michael Sean Winters renames the rhetoric and reality split “What Pope Francis Meant to Say,”³⁵ and rhetoric scholar Paul Lynch, aforementioned, is content to call Pope Francis’s rhetoric “undisciplined.”³⁶

When the criticism concerns the poor and economics, those analyzing Francis’s writings are quick to acknowledge that Francis is authorized to speak about Jesus Christ, but rhetoric which connects Christ and the poor is assumed not to be connected to reality (whether on account of reasons as diverse as the pope’s lack of economic expertise, his idealism, his Marxism, his being a Jesuit, or any number of reasons commentators have set forth for their need to articulate the reality that the pontiff’s rhetoric conceals). The rhetoric versus reality binary is not only assumed, but absolutized. Francis’s christological rhetoric about Christ and the poor may well inspire unto the good. It does not—and because of his (in)expertise cannot—constitute reality that is economic.

One might object that Francis himself seems to have authorized this division. One section of *EG* explains that “there exists a tension between ideas and realities.”³⁷ For Francis, ideas cannot be disconnected from realities, for the latter are greater than the former. However, the principle of the greatness of ideas and their ongoing relation is an incarnational one: “The principle of reality, of a word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization.”³⁸ Francis thus alludes to the fact that the rhetoric and reality split will be a tension bridged by rhetoric-become-reality, or in Francis’s terms, “a world already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew.”³⁹

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31. R. R. Reno, “Our Populist Pope,” *First Things*, December 2, 2013, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/12/our-populist-pope>.
 32. Sean Salai, “‘First Things’ editor R. R. Reno responds to Pope Francis’s visit to the United States,” *America Magazine*, September 26, 2015, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/hes-disruptor-interview-first-things-editor-rr-reno-pope-francis-us-visit>.
 33. R. R. Reno, “Criticizing Pope Francis,” *First Things*, January 8, 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/01/criticizing-pope-francis>.
 34. R. R. Reno, “Francis’s improv theology,” *First Things*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2016/06/franciss-improv-theology>.
 35. Michael Sean Winters, “The WPFMTS Award(s),” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 20, 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/wpfmts-awards>; and “Spinning the Pope: WPFMTS,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 23, 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/wpfmts-spinning-pope>.
 36. Lynch interestingly refers to the undisciplined quality of the rhetoric as giving it more value in reality for those who assume rhetoric and reality to be opposed. Lynch, “Attractions of Imperfection,” 3.
 37. *EG*, 231.
 38. *EG*, 233.
 39. *EG*, 233.

This christological expression for the tension between rhetoric and reality is not accidental, but fundamental to the ways in which both Augustine and Francis preach about the poor. For Augustine this takes the form of a rhetoric of christological exchange; for Francis, christological encounter. A reassessment of their rhetoric reveals preachers not only aware of the rhetoric and reality binary, but also convinced that Christ the Word-made-flesh might continue to speak reality into being.

Exchange: Augustine's Rhetoric Reconsidered

The Psalms, more than any other place in Scripture, provided Augustine a laboratory for experimentation with a christological exchange of voices. For Augustine, as for other patristic exegetes, Christ was the speaker of the Psalms.⁴⁰ For example, in Psalm 39:18, the psalmist prays, "I am needy and poor."⁴¹ Augustine's reading of this passage, repeated in multiple sermons, is illustrative of a rhetorical move he makes throughout his exegesis. Augustine identifies the voice of the psalmist who says "I am needy and poor" as the voice of Christ. Christ is needy, poor, and a beggar at the gate and seeking to enter.⁴² The association of Christ with the poor, naked, hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned is not at first surprising on account of the prevalence of Matt 25 in early Christian thought.⁴³ Yet here, Augustine has extended that thought by making his own fifth-century congregation the speaker of the voice of Christ:

All the members of Christ, the body of Christ diffused throughout the world, are like a single person asking God's help, one single beggar, one poor suppliant; and this is because Christ himself is that poor man, since he who was rich became poor, as the apostle tells us: "Though he was rich he became poor, so that by his poverty you might be enriched" (2 Cor 8:9).⁴⁴

This passage is illustrative of a way of speaking. Identifying a particular poor person or any particular condition of poverty is quite the opposite purpose of Augustine's rhetoric. All of his congregants—rich and poor—inasmuch as they speak the words of

40. An excellent introduction to the concept and its sources is Michael McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning: Augustine, the Psalms, and the Making of Church." *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 23–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390506600102>; also, Tarsicius van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality," in *Christology*, eds. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 84–94.

41. Augustine's psalter follows LXX numbering. Augustine, "Exposition of Psalm 39," in *Expositions of the Psalms*, 6 vols., trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 2000) 28. All English citations of Augustine's *Expositions of the Psalms* are hereafter from this translation.

42. Augustine, *Expositions* 39.28.

43. Andrew Hofer, "Matthew 25:31–46 as an Hermeneutical Rule in Augustine's 'Enarrationes in Psalmos,'" *The Downside Review* 126 (2008): 285–300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001258060812644505>.

44. Francis relies on a similar Pauline warrant. Augustine, *Expositions* 39.28.

the psalm are speaking the poverty of Christ as that which has become their own and will yield their enrichment together.

Augustine the rhetorician had had to relearn the rhetoric of Scripture in order to come to this insight of christological exchange. As a young man in the *Confessions*, he describes himself as needing to purge himself of a certain sort of speaking, to give up his post as a salesman of words in the marketplaces of rhetoric.⁴⁵ He did not cease to be a rhetorician, however. A rhetorical shift marks his conversion. After throwing himself down on the ground in a Milanese garden, he rose from the earth that evening mute with tears, a rhetorician without words. He had to learn to speak anew, this time with the words of Scripture that he took up and read.⁴⁶ This initial speaking the language of Scripture, which as a young man he had spurned for its offensive simplicity and vulgar Latin, continued to develop as he began to preach. As he attempted to speak a particular line from Psalm 22, he reengaged his rhetorical skills in order to make theological sense of the text.

Augustine's exegetical problem with a rhetorical solution came from the opening line of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁴⁷ Augustine found it puzzling that Christ should speak such a word. For, if Christ were truly God, then he would never have been abandoned. Likewise, if he were truly human, then he must have been able to give voice to the pain of such a moment. The risks of misinterpretation are significant. As Michael Cameron points out, wrongly explaining this line could instrumentalize Christ's humanity. God becomes a divine ventriloquist, speaking through the crucified Jesus's skin like a cheap puppet.⁴⁸ Augustine's solution was *prosopopeia*.⁴⁹ When the Second Person of the Trinity emptied himself and took up human form, this also meant the taking up of a human voice and human experience of all things but sin. Christ on the cross did not eliminate human abandonment—the earthly experience of the greatest distance from God—but rather transfigured it. Augustine preaches, "He who deigned to assume the form of a slave, and within that form to clothe us with himself, he who did not disdain to take us up into himself, did not disdain either to transfigure us into himself, and to speak in our words so that we might speak in his. This is the wonderful exchange."⁵⁰ From this insight onward,

45. Augustine, *Confessions* 9.2.2.

46. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.12.28; and Janet Soskice, "Monica's Tears: Augustine on Words and Speech," *New Blackfriars* 83 (2002): 448–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2002.tb01829.x>.

47. Augustine repeats the exegesis of this passage with frequency. This example comes from *Expositions* 30.2.3.

48. Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University, 2012), 58.

49. For foundational studies in Augustine's prosopological exegesis: Michael Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins "Enarrationes in Psalmos"* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997); and Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les Commentaires Patristiques du Psautier*, vols. 1–2 (Rome: Orientalium, 1982).

50. Augustine, *Expositions* 30.2.3.

Augustine preaches what William Babcock has termed the Christ of the exchange.⁵¹ *Prosopopeia* began a dynamic and ongoing exchange of Christ's voice and human voices. Exchange, for Augustine brought about "transfiguration."⁵² At first, Christ transfigured the human cry of abandonment into himself. Those who prayed Psalm 22 participated in the same. As Augustine continued to preach, however, he came to describe Christ as transfiguring his members into himself.

The transfiguration brought about through prosopological exchange increased in soteriological scope as Augustine encountered and considered the life and writings of Paul. Of particular note for Augustine's theology was the conversion of Saul in Acts 9. Saul, on the road to Damascus from Jerusalem, is knocked to the ground, blinded, and discourses with a voice who inquires, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4).⁵³ For Augustine, the referent of the pronoun "me" is the payload of prosopological insight. Saul inquires of the voice its identity. The response comes: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Augustine preaches that the voice of Jesus, already ascended to heaven, is not speaking with imprecision. Indeed, it might have been more accurate to describe Saul's persecution of Christ's members, or his holy ones, or even his saints. The voice asks Saul: Why are you persecuting "me?" For Augustine, this first-person pronoun furthered his prosopological Christology. Augustine preaches, "The head was crying out on behalf of the members, and the head was transfiguring the members into himself."⁵⁴ Transfiguration of voice had given way to transfiguration of persons.

These two watershed moments mark Augustine's full theology of exchange. In his exegesis of Psalm 22, Augustine saw that Christ transfigured the cry of humanity's abandonment into his own voice, into himself. That "marvelous exchange," the transfiguration of the cry of abandonment, is only expanded by transfiguration in Acts 9:4. For Augustine, no longer is it simply the voice being exchanged, but there is a transfiguration of persons. The members are being transfigured into Christ. For Augustine, this construction, called the "whole Christ" or *Christus totus*, rhetorically birthed and rhetorically practiced, became the dynamic mode through which he understood and interpreted the Scriptures as well as preached about the poor. At the heart of this transfigurative theology is the idea that rhetoric—in Christ—might reconstitute reality, transforming human persons together into Christ. Augustine continued to reference these two passages (Ps 22:1 and Acts 9:4) with frequency in other sermons when he brought up how the whole Christ might be transfigured together. This construction was hardly a mystical body theology. It was an earthy, gritty way of considering Christ and the poor.

51. William S. Babcock, "The Christ of the Exchange: A Study in the Christology of Augustine's Enarrationes in Psalmos" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1971), 30–45.

52. Kevin Grove, "Memory and the Whole Christ: Augustine and the Psalms" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2015), 47–58.

53. This passage is frequently referenced by Augustine in his preaching. This particular use comes from *Expositions* 30.2.3.

54. Augustine, *Expositions* 30.2.3.

Augustine's radical preaching about poverty comes into full theological view when considered through the whole Christ. A prominent text is his exposition of Psalm 38, which he interprets through his whole Christ theology. Augustine's psalm text read, "Although each human being walks as an image, nonetheless his perturbation is in vain. He heaps up treasure, but does not know for whom he will be gathering it."⁵⁵ The line has three parts which Augustine uses to cause great consternation for his hearers. The three issues are the collection of earthly treasure, vain perturbation, or worry, about that treasure, and the "image," which is a connection to Christ. Augustine arranges his exegesis of this idea around a single question: For whom are you keeping your riches? He, the preacher, does not hesitate to take up the voice (or thoughts) of his congregants: "I see what you intend to say (did you not think it would have occurred to me)? You will say, 'I am keeping my money for my children.'"⁵⁶ But, accruing money in order to supply it for one's children is unsatisfactory for Augustine. In fact, he describes it as using family loyalty to cloak injustice. Augustine instead calls for his assembly to learn about the Body of Christ.

Augustine uses the whole Christ to change the way the congregants relate to their own money. The ideal, Augustine explains, is to store their treasure in heaven, a reference to Matthew 6:20.⁵⁷ Augustine deliberately provokes anxiety about earthly treasure. He names the normal course of events: that people amass money and then pray for its security. They worry about its safety and even pray that it might not be stolen. For Augustine, it is ridiculous that one seek christological recourse to request the security of earthly wealth. It is at this point that if Augustine were primarily concerned about the salvation of a wealthy congregation, as some aforementioned commentators have alleged, he might correct their practice of praying to Christ for security and advise them to entrust their wealth to financiers. Augustine does not stop simply at putting into right relation material treasure and spiritual integrity. Augustine instead suggests to them that to believe in Christ means, as the Gospel of Matthew says, to entrust their treasure to heaven. How does one do that? Augustine reaches his rhetorical climax: they should store their treasure in Christ—that is, they should "put [their treasure] into the hands of the poor, give it to the needy."⁵⁸ Augustine's words must have been received as radical—and this is the benefit of his sermons having never been redacted or edited—because the assembly gasped or stirred at this point. Augustine's next line was "Ah, some covetous people felt a clutch at their hearts when I said that."⁵⁹

Augustine the preacher knew that rhetoric and reality did not match. But his christological rhetoric, grown through his own prosopological exegesis, functioned to awaken his congregation to realize that by speaking in Christ's words they were evermore being transfigured into Christ's body—members of a head who had gone before. This meant that rhetoric was speaking a new reality into them. That reality

55. Augustine, *Expositions* 38.11.

56. Augustine, *Expositions* 38.11.

57. Augustine, *Expositions* 38.12.

58. Augustine, *Expositions* 38.12.

59. Augustine, *Expositions* 38.12.

reconfigured their lives. In this example, it reconfigured the money that they might earn and store.

What begins to emerge through the example of poverty is that Augustine challenged his assembly to understand themselves and their surroundings through a new identity—that of Christ. All manners of things find expression in this new way of speaking, of becoming Christ together. Christ's bones lack peace;⁶⁰ his body laments and ascends together; Christ's speech includes men as well as women;⁶¹ he speaks the groaning of human longing into his members.⁶² The congregation's reality needed transfiguration. Christ's words, for Augustine, began that marvelous exchange. The liturgical performance of Scripture and its exegesis in the basilicas of Hippo and Carthage was the arena wherein rhetoric might transfigure earthly reality into Christ's reality.

Augustine, by practicing figurative exegesis of persons and groups, imaged reality expansively and creatively. In this manner, not only were the poor identified and shaped by rhetoric, but so were the rich, the Donatist, the Manichee, Augustine himself, the psalmist, and any member of the whole Christ. Augustine preached from a starting point of reality and rhetoric in a relationship of dynamic figuration. From that starting point, his rhetoric of in-corporation, his *Christus totus* rhetoric, was nuanced, performative, and the frame through which poverty also is included as a christological bridge to a new reality of richness. Fighting through the rhetoric to get to the poverty misses a theological program moving in the opposite direction. Examining the rhetoric in terms of its structures reveals not merely the poor, but the ritual performance and formation of christological identity as the poor.

An Objection: Rhetoric of Exchange and Egestas

Does the whole Christ, as some have alleged, run away with itself?⁶³ Contrary to objections, Augustine's rhetoric is careful in two ways. First, it is contemplative about the nature and character of Christ, which provides both inspiration for exchange and limit upon it. Second, it connects the whole Christ throughout time and space (as Augustine was fond of quoting Ps 22:27, to "all the ends of the earth"). The extreme poverty, *egestas*, of his "Exposition of Psalm 101" provides a clear example of both. As a preacher, he begins with a question to his congregants: If a single, poor, person is praying the psalm, how can he be Christ? Augustine goes through all of the ways that wealth itself came into being because of the Word from the dawn of creation. From gold, silver, and well-staffed households, to ideas, powers of the mind, healthy lives and bodies, and the coordination of human limbs, Augustine is sure that Christ is the cause for any richness that humans experience. Augustine is true to his program, that Christ's voice is to be heard in the Psalms. Therefore, a verse like "The bread I ate was

60. Augustine, *Expositions* 37.6.

61. Augustine, *Expositions* 26.2.23.

62. Augustine, *Expositions* 101.1.2; 125.2.

63. This is Boniface Ramsey's objection, n.21.

ashes, and my drink I would dilute with weeping” (101:10) presented an opportunity for Augustine to consider Christ’s poverty with his congregation by taking up the possibility that such an ascription would be offensive to Christ’s divinity. Augustine preaches,

I still hesitate to say, “It is Christ praying here”; yet that is what I want to say. Certain factors make me want to, but others make me fearful. It is he, yet it is not he. Already he bears the form of a servant, already he wears our frail, mortal flesh, already he has come for the purpose of dying; but we cannot yet see him in such penury that he could say, “The bread I ate was ashes, and my drink I would dilute with weeping.” He must add to poverty a yet deeper poverty and transfigure our lowly body into himself; he must be our head and we his members; let us be two in one flesh. In order to become poor initially he left his Father and took on the form of a slave, but now, born from the virgin, let him leave his mother too, and cling to his wife, and let them be two in one flesh. Thus they will be two in one voice as well, and in that one voice we shall have no cause for surprise if we hear our own voice saying, “The bread I ate was ashes, and my drink I would dilute with weeping; for he has deigned to have us as his members.”⁶⁴

In a concatenation of salvation history, Augustine has nonetheless accomplished a union of voices. His preaching begins with the person of Christ himself, acknowledging complications of wrongly predicating penury, *egestas*, literally “extreme poverty,” to Christ. Yet, Augustine presses ahead by ascribing to Christ a double assumption of poverty, first in the incarnation through divinity assuming human flesh and second by Christ’s joining to himself in ongoing relation the other members of his body. That second impoverishment of Christ brings about an enrichment: the ongoing union of voices. Not only can Christ say, but Augustine’s congregants should not find themselves surprised to understand as their own, the words of the psalmist about destitution. Their rhetoric, too, might be a part of reality renewed and fulfilled.

This speaking of destitution becomes a trans-temporal consideration of suffering in Christ. Augustine preaches of the whole Christ: “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. You are in trouble today; therefore I am in trouble. Someone else is in trouble tomorrow, so I am in trouble; after this generation others, its descendants and their successors again, will be in trouble, and I am in trouble. Even to the end of the world.”⁶⁵ The whole Christ allows for a collapse of all destitutions such that because one hears the voice of Christ as his or her own, then one also begins to hear not only the cry of the poor present but those throughout the world and throughout time. Augustine implores the whole Christ: “What destitution prompts you to knock, in the hope that the door will be opened? Tell us, let us hear about your need; for then we shall find ourselves in the same need, and join our plea with yours.”⁶⁶ We cannot know how many of his hearers, upon entering the basilica for the liturgy, would have

64. Augustine, *Expositions* 101.1.2.

65. Augustine, *Expositions* 101.1.3.

66. Augustine, *Expositions* 101.1.3.

diagnosed themselves as in a position to be able to say with the psalmist that their bread was ashes and their tears the dilution of their drink. Yet, by the time Augustine has gone through his exegesis, he recommends, “Listen, and recognize yourself if you can.”⁶⁷ The hearer is to recognize the voice of Christ: the first-century Christ of Judea, the Christ whose members lived in fifth-century Hippo, and the Christ whose members included both the original psalmist who suffered and those who will experience destitution in the future. Self-recognition at once prompts the individual to understand him- or herself within Christ, but then to expand that recognition to others.

Concerning the preaching of Augustine, the allegation that he was no Oscar Romero because there is no evidence that he intended the political or social inversion his rhetoric implies misses the manner in which Augustine’s rhetoric of christological exchange reconfigured reality for rich and poor alike. The outcome of Augustine’s rhetoric was that his hearers became evermore the Christ whose words were being spoken in them. Even the practical consequences became meaningful because of this rhetorical exchange. For those with alms that meant giving their riches to the poor. For beggars it meant looking out for other beggars. For all it meant learning to see, touch, taste, and encounter the world as Christ. Christ speaks in his members both the mystery of his incarnational poverty and also the ascended glory of heavenly richness. Augustine’s rhetoric draws all into a new reality in Christ by which the earthly could be transfigured from within. His sermons indicate that he understood his congregation as being self-aware of that transfigurative task. It certainly helps to explain why people continued to show up to his popular afternoon sermons on the Psalms when the stadium nearby offered other entertainments.⁶⁸ By means of prosopology—a marvelous exchange of voices—Augustine’s epideictic rhetoric not only held up an ideal to be emulated, it allowed congregations in Hippo and Carthage the opportunity to incarnate the ideal themselves, inhabit it during the liturgy, and—ideally, though concrete evidence is lost to us—live it beyond the realm of the basilica.

Encounter: Francis’s Rhetoric Reconsidered

Pope Francis cites Augustine less than his predecessor, and I am not here making the case that Francis is relying on Augustine as model. Francis does, however, show a remarkable proximity to Augustine in terms of the way his rhetoric for poverty has a christological substructure. Francis’s rhetoric of encounter emerges as the prosopological parallel of Augustine’s exchange.

One of Francis’s off-the-cuff addresses shows the pope mirroring not only the imagery but the issues of Augustine’s Exposition of Psalm 38. At a vespers service in Havana, Cuba with women and men religious, Pope Francis gave an unscripted sermon on poverty after hearing the remarks of Sister Yaileny Ponce Torres, DC, and Cardinal Jaime Lucas Ortega y Alamino. These remarks make explicit the theological substructure of Francis’s rhetoric and poverty:

67. Augustine, *Expositions* 101.1.3.

68. Augustine often references in his sermons the games going on across town.

Cardinal Jaime [Lucas Ortega y Alamino] happened to say a very uncomfortable word, an extremely uncomfortable word, one which goes against the whole “cultural” structure of our world. He said “poverty,” and he repeated it several times. I think the Lord wanted us to keep hearing it, and to receive it in our hearts. The spirit of the world doesn’t know this word, doesn’t like it, hides it—not for shame, but for scorn. And if it has to sin and offend God in order to avoid poverty, then that’s what it does. The spirit of the world does not love the way of the Son of God, who emptied himself, became poor, became nothing, abased himself in order to be one of us.⁶⁹

Francis seamlessly transitions between poverty and Christ in this paragraph because poverty—in Francis’s rhetoric—is “the way of the Son of God,” a reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9. In fact, Francis continues in the same sermon with an excursus on wealth (in this case speaking of the financial holdings of religious communities) in a way strikingly similar to Augustine’s causing his congregation to gasp. Francis preaches,

A wise old priest once told me about what happens when the spirit of wealth, of wealthy worldliness enters the heart of a consecrated man or woman, a priest or bishop, or even a Pope—anyone. He said that when we start to save up money to ensure our future—isn’t this true?—then our future is not in Jesus, but in a kind of spiritual insurance company which we manage. When, for example, a religious congregation begins to gather money and save, God is so good that he sends them a terrible bursar who brings them to bankruptcy. Such terrible bursars are some of the greatest blessings God grants his Church, because they make her free, they make her poor. Our Holy Mother the Church is poor; God wants her poor as he wanted our Holy Mother Mary to be poor.⁷⁰

Francis employs the same sequence of images as Augustine. Storing earthly money is not guaranteed. Augustine spoke of the thief who might be taking the goods of his congregants as they sat listening to his sermon. Francis presents the terrible bursar as a providential blessing. The point of his sermon—which he directs at “anyone”—is that the acquisition of wealth prompts a future not in Jesus but in wealth. The taking up of poverty—how precisely is indeterminate in this speech—indicates a future with Christ. Thus, Francis connects poverty to Christ and concludes with language about the church for which he is famous: “God wants [the Church] poor.”⁷¹ Francis continues to draw out poverty throughout his remarks in order to claim that poverty should be sown into the hearts of those present: “because that is where Jesus is.”⁷²

69. Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” celebration of vespers (Havana, Cuba, September 20, 2015), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150920_cuba-omelia-vespri.html (hereafter cited as “Homily at Vespers”).

70. Francis, “Homily at Vespers.”

71. In his “Homily at Vespers,” Francis connects the poverty of the church to Mary’s poverty.

72. Francis, “Homily at Vespers.”

The poor and poverty are referenced, sometimes in passing and other times with extensive treatments, in around two-thirds of Pope Francis's published sermons since the beginning of the pontificate.⁷³ If analyzed in terms of any of the actual markers of poverty—of peoples, of religious orders, of the church—his remarks are unsystematic at best, self-contradictory at times, and instrumentalizing of poor persons at worst. Yet, underneath all of this, Francis's writings on poverty fit into a rhetoric of encounter. Like Augustine's exchange, it emerges through patterns of exegesis, with Pauline reflections on the incarnation serving as major markers.

Exegetical Configuration: 2 Corinthians 8:9

Perhaps the most important exegetical marker of Francis's rhetoric comes from 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Francis draws on this line in two key moments of his public preaching.⁷⁴ Francis celebrated Mass on the feast of his namesake in Assisi's St. Francis Square on October 4, 2013, in the first year of his pontificate. He sets out in that sermon the way in which Francis models "encounter" with Jesus. Because St. Francis clothed himself with poverty in imitation of Christ he was enriched by Christ's poverty. The encounter with Christ, beginning for St. Francis at the crucified's gaze at San Damiano, became the orienting and creative inspiration for his care for the poor and weary as well as his open outreach to the created order. The pope speaks of a "new creation" witnessed in the life of Francis.⁷⁵ That new creation is christological in form—in Christ's poverty, in Christ's cross the Savior continues to make instruments of peace recreated by the love of the cross.

In his second key example of the same exegesis, Pope Francis established a World Day of the Poor in 2017, to be celebrated on the last Sunday in Ordinary Time.⁷⁶ In the sermon at Mass, Francis again cites 2 Corinthians 8:9, describing how in the poor one

73. This number excludes daily Mass reflections (n.13).

74. Francis also cites this text in the apostolic exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Gaudete et Exsultate*, mentioned below.

75. Francis, "Homily of Holy Father Francis," pastoral visit (Assisi, October 4, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131004_omelia-visita-assisi.html.

76. The pope's addresses that day took both the form of a sermon at Mass and a public message on the same topic. Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis," First World Day of the Poor (Rome, June 13, 2017), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20170613_messaggio-i-giornatamondiale-poveri-2017.html (hereafter cited as "Message for the Poor"); Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Mass for World Day of the Poor (Rome, November 19, 2017), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171119_omelia-giornata-mondiale-poveri.html (hereafter cited as "Homily for the Poor").

meets Christ who became poor. For that reason, Francis describes in the poor “a saving power.”⁷⁷ In their faces one sees Jesus’s face; on their lips “even if pursed in pain, we can hear his words: ‘This is my body.’”⁷⁸ The poor, in Francis’s preaching, are a “passport to paradise.”⁷⁹ One could and ought to object here that the poor are being instrumentalized in order to save the wealthy pilgrims who made it to Rome in late fall, obtained tickets to attend the papal liturgy, and heard the pope preach. One could justly allege that the poor are entirely subsumed in service of the conversion of a wealthy listening audience. Yet, Francis’s expression of the poor as “passports” opens onto the plainspoken injunction that “to love the poor means to combat all forms of poverty, spiritual and material.”⁸⁰ The difficulty Francis’s sermon presents is that his rhetoric contradicts multiple realities at once. On the one hand, if the reality is the materially poor, then one sees both an exhortation to fight their poverty as well as see Christ in them. On the other hand, the poor may be passports for the rich. Or, the reality could be the spiritual poverty of the listener present in Francis’s midst. All of these are present simultaneously. One could at this point simply dismiss Francis’s rhetoric. I wish instead to suggest a structuring principle.

The way in which Francis’s rhetoric holds these realities together is through “encounter.” Encounter is a christological rhetoric, following the path of Christ who became poor in order to enrich (2 Cor 8:9). It is a word that Francis uses with frequency, but which he describes with precision in his message instituting World Day of the Poor. There, Francis describes the different ways he configures encounter. I suggest three aspects of encounter: encounter has an enduring nature, encounter is eucharistically consummated, and it is evangelical in vocabulary. All three of these aspects show forth the christological substructure of Francis’s rhetoric of encounter.

Encounter as Enduring

The first characteristic of encounter is its enduring nature. Francis employs bodily language. Whereas for Augustine, the christological exchange primarily took place in terms of voice, Francis emphasizes physical interaction in his own *prosopopeia*. Francis’s concern is that engagement with the poor might not merely be fleeting, occasional, or even impromptu. He gives the example of St. Francis embracing the lepers and then giving them alms. It is immediately apparent that St. Francis had direct contact with the poor—bodily touch and alms as provision for bodily need. That was not the turning point of St. Francis’s conversion. Rather, the pope preaches, Francis “chose to go to Gubbio to stay with them.” The abiding nature of Francis’s relation to the lepers was the source of his conversion. He stayed with the lepers and exchanges of mercy and *caritas* followed. St. Francis followed Christ’s journey, abiding with those who were poor, and discovered that they were mutually enriched.

77. Francis, “Homily for the Poor.”

78. Francis, “Homily for the Poor.”

79. Francis, “Homily for the Poor.”

80. Francis, “Homily for the Poor.”

Pope Francis's *prosopopeia* of physical exchange prompts the question of where the flesh of Christ can be found. On the one hand, the flesh of Christ is located in the poor themselves. At once, like the lepers in the hagiography of Francis, the poor are the flesh of Christ. This runs through Pope Francis's preaching in vibrant imagery that extends beyond alleviating the material condition of poverty such that the bodies of the poor, as Christ, are to be "caressed,"⁸¹ "treasured,"⁸² and "shar[ed] with."⁸³ In Francis's rhetoric, the Matthew 25 encounter with the hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, ill, or imprisoned is augmented by these verbs—caressing, treasuring, and sharing—which indicate the endurance of that encounter. On the other hand, Christ is also located in the ones who reach out to the poor such that Christ "needs our eyes to see, our ears to hear."⁸⁴ Francis frequently describes the action of the church towards the poor as the action of the physical Body of Christ in extension to the poor. In Francis's *prosopopeia* of bodily encounter, the poor are Christ's body and those who care for the poor are Christ's body. The bi-directional association clarifies the "encounter." In Christ, the poor and those who care for them discover themselves in an abiding christological union.

Another example of the physical encounter of Christ with Christ that Francis uses is Teresa of Calcutta. Teresa certainly cared for the flesh of the poor as Christ's body. Yet, Francis adds more to the relation between Christ and Teresa: "'I am thirsty' He said: 'My child, come, take me to the hovels of the poor. Come, be my light. I cannot do this alone. They do not know me, and that is why they do not love me. Bring me to them.' Mother Teresa, starting with one concrete person, thanks to her smile and her way of touching their wounds, brought the good news to all."⁸⁵ Francis's prosopological rhetoric here is striking. Francis takes up the voice of Christ in an imagined conversation with Teresa of Calcutta. He says to her that he is thirsting, presumably such that Teresa will give him to drink. Yet at the same time, he instructs Teresa to take him

81. Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Jubilee of Deacons, extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (Rome, May 29, 2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160529_omelia-giubileo-diaconi.html.

82. This is a frequent association of Francis when preaching on St. Lawrence. See, for instance, Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Jubilee for Socially Excluded People, extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (Rome, November 16, 2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161113_giubileo-omelia-senza-fissa-dimora.html.

83. Francis, "Message for the Poor," 3, 8–9.

84. Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Holy Mass for Migrants (Rome, July 6, 2018), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180706_omelia-migranti.html.

85. Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Holy Chrism Mass (Rome, April 13, 2017), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170413_omelia-crisma.html; see also Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"*, ed. B. Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 39–53.

to the hovels of the poor. Teresa herself is going out to the poor as Christ's needed help. She is light. She is his company. Her smile and her touching the poor's wounds—again Francis privileges the tactile—is the way in which Christ is brought to his own body which is thirsting.

Both the examples of St. Francis and Teresa of Calcutta show Pope Francis's encounter as subverting the occasional nature the word "encounter" itself suggests. Once one considers the way in which his Christology functions, encounter no longer signifies an embrace, a short connection of eyes, or almsgiving, but rather the ongoing of connection from Christ's body to Christ's body.

Encounter as Eucharistic

The second aspect of Francis's encounter is eucharistic—both in genesis and in culmination. Inasmuch as Francis describes going forth from the eucharistic liturgy to care for the poor, he echoes figures from the tradition. Citing John Chrysostom, Francis explains that honor for the body of Christ is to extend from the beauty of liturgical celebrations to the body of Christ as it is encountered outside of the church in the suffering, the cold, and the naked.⁸⁶ Indeed, for Francis, the response to the sacramental communion of the Body and Blood of Christ is touching the suffering bodies of the poor. The body of Christ, "broken in the sacred liturgy, can be seen, through charity and sharing, in the faces and persons of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters."⁸⁷ For Francis, however, this eucharistic sending out into the community is completed by returning to the altar alongside the poor. He suggests in his message for the World Day of the Poor that in the week leading up to that Sunday, people should make every effort at moments of encounter—friendship, solidarity, and concrete assistance. Those encounters of mission culminate in the poor as well as volunteers inviting one another into the shared eucharistic liturgy. That union of prayer on the final Sunday of Ordinary Time is meant to render a "more authentic" celebration of Christ the King. Francis mentions Christ's paschal poverty twice on the journey from the cross to "the power of Love that awakens him to new life."⁸⁸ The encounter in the world by both the poor and those who serve them culminates in the liturgy of love unto new life.

The eucharistic nature of the encounter is the way in which Francis suggests how people might be themselves transformed into Christ's richness. In the Gospels, the apostles find themselves, for instance, unable to feed the crowds with five loaves and two fish. Francis identifies this as "the poverty of what [the disciples] were able to make available."⁸⁹ Christ then descends into this poverty. Just as in the miracle of the

86. Francis, "Message for the Poor," 3.

87. Francis, "Message for the Poor," 3.

88. Francis, "Message for the Poor," 7.

89. Francis, "Homily of Holy Father Francis," Holy Mass on the solemnity of Corpus Christi (Rome, May 30, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130530_omelia-corpus-domini.html (hereafter cited as "Corpus Christi Homily").

loaves and fishes wherein Christ takes up the poverty of the disciples in feeding the multitude, so “in the Eucharist the Lord makes us walk on his road, that of service, of sharing, of giving; and if it is shared, that little we have, that little we are, becomes riches, for the power of God—which is the power of love—comes down into our poverty to transform it.”⁹⁰ The Eucharist serves as the repeated journey of christological impoverishment and enrichment. The eucharistic nature of the encounter culminates in becoming the shared richness of Christ.

Encounter as Evangelical

The final aspect of Francis’s rhetoric of encounter is its evangelical vocabulary, literally of poverty as good news. Francis preached in the Philippines, “The poor are at the center of the Gospel, are at heart of the Gospel; if we take away the poor from the Gospel, we can’t understand the whole message of Jesus Christ.”⁹¹ In so doing, Francis does not hide from the challenge of scriptural images. Francis, for instance, claims that Luke “does not exaggerate” when he describes in Acts 2:45 that the early followers of the way “sold their possessions and distributed them to all, as any had need.”⁹² Rather, Francis claims that Luke’s words are for believers in every generation.⁹³ Poverty, Francis claims, is “above all a call to follow Jesus in his own poverty.”⁹⁴ It becomes—through the language of the Gospels—an imaginary for privileging relationships over material goods, the freedom to shoulder responsibility with grace, and an interior attitude that prevents one from settling on money as one’s goal in life.⁹⁵ In this regard, evangelical poverty is even for the materially poor. Francis even addresses the poor themselves: “I ask the poor in our cities and our communities not to lose the sense of evangelical poverty that is part of their daily life.”⁹⁶ In this way, the language of poverty, because it is an evangelical language, speaks to all, challenges all, and ideally becomes an imaginary for that which might be.

Ultimately, when Francis uses the phrase “culture of encounter” to describe the World Day of the Poor, he is suggesting precisely a rhetoric of poverty structured by Christ. In terms of the physical exchange, the Body of Christ reaches out and caresses the Body of Christ in its brokenness. In the Eucharist, those who together become the richness of Christ not only go out to the world’s poverty, but return to pray together. Lastly, the arresting quality of the words of the New Testament provide literal

90. Francis, “Corpus Christi Homily.”

91. Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” apostolic journey to Sri Lanka and the Philippines (Manila, January 16, 2015), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150116_srilanka-filippine-omelia-cattedrale-manila.html.

92. Francis, “Message for the Poor,” 2.

93. Francis, “Message for the Poor,” 2.

94. Francis, “Message for the Poor,” 4.

95. Francis, “Message for the Poor,” 4.

96. Francis, “Message for the Poor,” 4.

challenges for all persons in Christ. Francis poses the same question to his hearers as Augustine: “Where am I making my investments?”⁹⁷ Like for Augustine, the answer to Francis’s question is Christ—in such a way to demand all of one’s wealth and all of one’s self.

An Objection: Rhetoric of Encounter and Reality of Economy

With this vantage on Francis’s rhetoric it is important to revisit a central objection from the rhetoric and reality binary. The claim that Francis’s rhetoric does not adequately account for economic realities is a serious one. Here I wish to point out corroborating evidence for the foregoing argument from *EG* and from *Gaudete et Exsultate* (*GE*).⁹⁸ Though a full treatment of either apostolic exhortation is beyond the scope of this article, the two bring into relief the relevance of Francis’s rhetoric of encounter for the consideration of economic realities.

In *EG*, the rhetoric of encounter is a structuring principle throughout the entire text, from its first occurrence in the opening sentence to the final section on Mary. The word occurs nearly three dozen times in the text. Francis cites 2 Corinthians 8:9, holds up Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Calcutta as models of enduring public scandal, and urges the fostering of new relationships in Christ.⁹⁹ It is suggestive for economic realities to read the entire text first through Francis’s rhetoric of encounter with Christ in the thick way in which we have just described above. Doing so does not allow any earthly system inside the Catholic Church or without—and Francis mentions many from the invisible hand of the market to self-sustaining governance structures within the church—to escape evaluation in terms of encounter with other persons in Christ and as Christ. The rhetoric of encounter demands christological analysis of economic reality.

In *GE*, Francis continues this same line of thought when speaking about poverty in his explanation of the Lukan beatitude: “blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Luke, Francis writes, “invites us to live a plain and austere life. He calls us to share in the life of those most in need, the life lived by the Apostles, and ultimately to configure ourselves to Jesus who, though rich, ‘made himself poor.’”¹⁰⁰ Including a signal reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9, Francis’s logic remains consistent throughout these presentations of poverty, diverse as they may be. Christ structures the journey through poverty. To miss the christological shape of discourse on poverty and the poor is to miss the christological trajectory and telos that the words are intended to bring forth.

97. Francis, “Homily for the Poor.”

98. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (March 19, 2018), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html (hereafter cited as *GE*).

99. *EG* 197, 183, and 87–92, respectively.

100. *GE* 70.

Charles Clark, an economist speaking and writing alongside theologians at a 2015 meeting of the College Theology Society, writes, “Francis is saying what we would expect Jesus to say. It is disturbing because he is not saying what we wish Jesus would say.”¹⁰¹ Clark is right in part. Jesus did say challenging things about poverty and those words might well create a healthy tension with some economic theories. But Clark also does not see the hopeful aspect of Francis’s encounter. Francis is not simply challenging economic ideas, but advocating a complete renewal of human relations. It is not only economic reality, but all reality that stands to be shaken.¹⁰²

Incarnational Rhetoric and Theological Method

At the root of this rhetorical analysis has been the exploration of the ongoing consequences of the Incarnation for speech acts. It is here that both Augustine and Francis challenge theological considerations at the intersection of soteriology and semiotics. For Augustine, his incarnational insight, of the God grown weak at his feet, was a key turning point in his own rejection of dualism and Gnosticism, and his conversion to the Christian community to whom he would preach for nearly forty years.¹⁰³ For Francis, this incarnational insight emerges from the deep theology of the peoples which scholars of Latin American theology have traced through his earlier writings.¹⁰⁴ For both thinkers, their rhetoric derives its power from the incarnation. The incarnational climax of John 1:14 makes this logic clear. *O logos sarx egeneto*, or, “the word flesh became,” posits a particular and energizing relationship between rhetoric and reality. In one way, the rhetoric of the Word is limited by the reality of the flesh, the infinite grammatically serving as the subject of finite becoming. Yet, at the same time, flesh cannot remain the same reality after having been affected by the rhetoric of the Word. Both Augustine and Francis seem to be themselves taken with the fruitfulness of this incarnational logic.

To evaluate either thinker’s rhetoric only in terms of reality—from evidence of actual alleviation of poverty to economic systems which proponents claim to have benefitted the common good—is to introduce a binary that undercuts the rhetorical frame and the heart of both thinkers’ visions of christological transformation. In search of the facts, the binary method can elide Jesus Christ, or worse, relegate Christ only to rhetoric. In positive terms, both Francis’s and Augustine’s rhetorics hold forth hope that performative Christologies of encounter and exchange are not simply words or ideas, but words enfolded, transfigured, caressed, and borne together in an ongoing way.

101. Charles M. A. Clark, “Pope Francis, Economics, and Catholic Social Thought,” *Horizons* 42 (2015): 128–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2015.47>.

102. For expansive applications of Francis’s “encounter” in culture, doctrine, ecology, and mercy, see *Pope Francis and the Event of Encounter*, ed. J. Cavadini and D. Wallenfang (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).


103. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.18.24.

104. See, for instance, Rafael Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017).

Conclusion

Both Augustine and Francis preach social inversion, authorizing the reasonable question of the relation of their rhetoric to reality. This study has shown that both of their rhetorics do not fit modern expectations of legislative or deliberative modes and corresponding structures of rhetoric versus reality analysis. Both Augustine and Francis employ an incarnational form of classical rhetoric called *prosopopeia* by which regular acts of speech (Augustine) or physical care (Francis) become exchange and encounter with one another and with Jesus Christ. Cicero and Quintilian had considered that prosopological rhetoric could call down the gods and wake the dead. Augustine and Francis use it to enact something equally radical, that human persons by means of their encounters and exchanges, especially with and as the poor, might become Christ. Both thinkers challenge contemporary theology, surrounded by predicaments of rhetoric negatively correlated to reality, to consider again the soteriological power of rhetoric to incarnate and sustain renewed reality. Both thinkers, in their rhetoric on poverty properly understood, make a strong and ongoing case for the voice of the Gospels and the church to speak Christ into and to transfigure the daily economic realities we inhabit.

ORCID iD

Kevin Grove  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1433-9625>

Author Biography

Kevin Grove, CSC (PhD, University of Cambridge), is Assistant Professor of systematic theology at the University of Notre Dame with research interests in memory, Augustine, Christology, and the intersection of historical theology and contemporary phenomenology.