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The Humble God

Healer, Mediator, and Sacrifice

St. Augustine and Christ's Saving Humility

SOMETIMES IT TAKES a lot of humiliation to learn a little humility. After the widely publicized clerical sexual abuse scandal of the past year, the Catholic Church has been challenged to learn again what it means to be a humble, pilgrim church. Certainly, whatever vestiges of the Church triumphant presently remain in the American Church, it is clear that church leadership—lay and clerical—cannot be based on self-preserving power and prideful isolation. Only a humble and repentant leadership can regain the trust of the faithful, and such leadership is possible only through a more explicit following of Christ, the humble one.

While many of the early Church Fathers spoke of humility as *the* Christian virtue,¹ no one was more insistent about its primacy in the Christian life than St. Augustine, whose views bear directly on the needs of the American Church at this time. By relating humility to almost every aspect of his theology, Augustine deeply influenced the understanding of Christian humility in the Western Church.² As one whose writings were sparked in large part by polemics, pastoral concerns, and inquiries from church leaders as well as ordinary

believers and unbelievers, Augustine did not treat the topic of humility with scholastic precision. Nonetheless, the term itself pervades his work and is consistently presented as key to understanding Christ and the Christian way of life.³

Augustine understood humility as a distinctly Christian attribute. It was inconceivable to him that humility could be valued apart from a belief in the Incarnation. In reference to the various moral systems of his day, Augustine writes, “Everywhere are to be found excellent precepts concerning morals and discipline, but this humility is not to be found. This way of humility comes from another source; it comes from Christ. . . . What else did he teach but this humility?”⁴ In other words, only through the grace of believing in this divine descent could we appreciate humility as central to human perfection. In the *Confessions*, Augustine explains that Christian love begins and builds on the “foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus.”⁵ All other Christian virtues are built on and sustained by this foundational Christian attribute that grows out of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.⁶ To know Jesus is to know his humility, for he is the archetype and master of humility (*magister humilitatis*).⁷

What is so singular about Augustine’s teaching on humility is that he so clearly views Christ’s humility as more than a moral example to be imitated; it is the central way that our reconciliation with God occurs. Christ’s humility is both salvific and exemplary.⁸ It is the way and the truth. Augustine’s distinctive contribution to the topic of humility, then, is his direct linking of humility to soteriology:

On every side the humility of the good master is being assiduously impressed upon us, seeing that our very salvation in Christ consists in the humility of Christ. There would have been no salvation for us, after all, if Christ had not been prepared to humble himself for our sakes.⁹

Christ’s humility is a “saving humility.”¹⁰ Moreover, the way that God saves us is inseparable from salvation itself: “our very salvation in Christ consists in the humility of Christ.”¹¹

To understand better the salvific nature of humility, Augustine directs us to three fundamental aspects of Christ's humility. First, it is *confrontational*—stressing the contrast between humility and pride: “Because pride has wounded us, humility makes us whole.”¹² Just as the source of spiritual blindness and bondage is human pride, so the source of spiritual sight and freedom is divine humility. Second, it is *mediatory*—bridging the chasm that pride creates between humanity and God. Third, and most important, it is *kenotic*. Here we see the full extent and cost of humility. The divine self-emptying begins with the Incarnation and extends to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8-9). By examining these three aspects, I hope to show how pivotal Christ's humility is to understanding the way he effects salvation: It combats the universal disease of pride; it makes Christ a passageway for us to God; and, last, it expiates our sin through the shedding of Christ's blood.

A. Christ's Humility: Healing by Contrast

It is in the context of God coming to save and, ultimately, to divinize humanity, that Christ's humility takes on such prominence for Augustine. Only God, Augustine argues, could repair the divine-human rupture: “From his exalted loftiness he made the world, by his lowly humility he conquered the world. Unless Christ had agreed to be humble, there would be no signing of the faithful today with the sign of Christ.”¹³ In other words, God creates with power, splendor, and majesty, but God saves with poverty, humility, and vulnerability. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Augustine writes, “The strength of Christ created you; the weakness of Christ re-created you. The strength of Christ caused what-was-not to be; the weakness of Christ caused what-was to perish not. He produced us in his strength; he sought us in his weakness.”¹⁴

The stubbornness of our pride manifested itself not only in our inability to bear divine radiance, but also in our inability to grasp

humility. In his commentary on Psalm 33 [34], Augustine observes that the humility of “prophets and patriarchs” was not enough to turn the estranged human race back to God:

Since we had abandoned God through pride, it was impossible for us to return to him except through humility, and there was no one we could take as a model in this effort. Pride had corrupted the whole human race. And even if there were some men to be found who were humble in spirit, such as the prophets and patriarchs, mankind could not bring itself to imitate mere men, however humble. In order then that men might not disdain to imitate a humble man, God himself became humble; even human pride could not refuse to follow in the steps of God!¹⁵

Without losing what God is, God becomes what God is not. In Jesus Christ, a new kind of sublimity is introduced, a new way of seeing is discovered—lowliness is inseparable from grandeur; humility is inextricably tied to exaltation. Augustine’s emphasis on the contrasts in Christ comes to the fore in his Christmas sermons. Reveling in the language of antithesis and paradox, Augustine presents the contrast between that which is seen (humility) and that which is unseen (divinity) in Christ: “He was being suckled at the breast, and he was holding the universe together. He was lying in a manger, and feeding angels.”¹⁶ In the opposition between pride and humility, Augustine sees Christ’s salvific strategy—an overcoming of human pride through the embodiment of its opposite. *On Christian Doctrine* explains that the “principle of contraries is illustrated in the fact that the example of His [Christ’s] virtues cures our vices.”¹⁷ The movement of the Incarnation toward us from superiority to inferiority is the reverse of the movement of human pride away from God from inferiority to superiority. In pride, we fail to see the fundamentally unequal relationship between God and creatures. In humility, we recover an awareness of that inequality.

Although Augustine tends to be more concerned about exaggerated notions of self-importance than with self-deprecation, he, nonetheless, stresses Christ's humility as counteracting despair as well. In this sense, humility lifts us up from despair to a proper understanding of our own worth. The Word made flesh enkindles a new hope, a hope that human beings are not absolutely cut off from God but can be reunited with God and even become partakers in God's own life. Augustine preaches,

Listen . . . in case you should be broken by despair; listen to how you have been loved when you weren't in the least lovable, listen to how you were loved when you were foul, ugly, before there was anything in you worth loving. You were first loved, in order to become worth loving.¹⁸

The humbling of the Word simultaneously reveals the desperate state of humanity and the immense worth of humanity. God's extravagant self-emptying love revealed in the Incarnation highlights, by contrast, the possessiveness of human love.

In describing Christ's redemptive work as more curative than juridical, Augustine draws on medical images of "cleansing," "purifying," and "healing." As the *medicus humilis*, Christ heals our particular infirmity and makes possible our return to God. If human beings had suffered from a different ailment, a different medicine would have been prescribed to counteract the symptoms;¹⁹ humility is the remedy because pride is the sickness. Christ, the "great Physician," comes without an invitation because human pride has so crippled ailing sinners that they do not see their need for healing. Like a patient delirious with fever the prideful turn away from Christ's healing ointment. In this situation, only God's perfect expression of humility can reverse the most debilitating human infirmity. In his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Augustine illustrates this healing by confrontation and contrast:

You see a man who was covered with sores and mange healed; but because that fluid was not eliminated, the sore comes back again. The physician, knowing this, gets rid of the fluid, removes the cause, and there will be no sores. From what source does wickedness abound? From pride. Heal pride and there will be no wickedness. Therefore, in order that the cause of all diseases, that is, pride, might be healed, he came down and the Son of God became humble.²⁰

Augustine rather graphically shows that the medicine of humility cuts away at pride and, by then searing the wound, effects a salutary suffering. Christ's humility rebukes pride and cuts to the root of sin so that healing can take place. God's healing is both gentle and abrasive; it cuts and burns when necessary.²¹ And so, the healing of humility involves an initial period of exposure and a "remedial pain."²² As in Augustine's own conversion experience, things become worse before they get better.

Christ, as the antidote to human pride, serves the dual role of physician and medicine. Augustine explains, "Thus the Wisdom of God, setting out to cure men, applied Himself to cure them, being at once the Physician and the Medicine. Because man fell through pride, he applied humility as a cure."²³ Continuing this metaphor, Augustine explains that the humble Physician takes the medicine of humility himself as a way of encouraging the prideful who resist the antidote:

So he is the doctor who in no way needs any such medicine; and yet to encourage the sick person he drinks what he had no need of himself, by way of coaxing him out of his refusal and easing his dread of the medicine; he drinks it first. *The cup*, he says, *which I am to drink* (Matt. 20:22). There's nothing in me that needs to be treated by that cup, but I'm going to drink it all the same, so that you won't loftily refuse to drink it; and you certainly need to.²⁴

Here the “cup of humility”—the passion of Christ—is seen as the most extreme gesture of encouraging a fallen humanity to receive the healing of humility. The “Doctor of Humility,” who is perfectly healthy, drinks the very cure he is administering. He persuades the sick by taking the cure that he does not need. He suffers and pays the price for humanity’s fallenness.²⁵

Augustine goes so far as to compare fallen humanity to a madman who refuses the cure and mocks the physician:

For he [Christ] was a physician and had come to cure a madman. A physician pays no attention to what a madman says to him, but is concerned only that he return to health and become sane. Even if he is struck by the madman, he does not care. The madman inflicts new wounds, the physician cures the original illness. So too the Lord came to a sick man, a madman; he paid no attention to the insults he received and the wounds inflicted on him, thereby teaching men humility so that having been taught by humility they might be cured of pride.²⁶

Through the image of the madman, Augustine vividly illustrates how the humility of Christ saves a people who are not simply ashamed of their disease (pride) but who despise the medicine and the medicine giver. In the end, it is only the grace of God that moves us from hardening and taking vengeance on the humble Christ to being receptive and transformed by his healing touch.

In sum, Augustine’s description of Christ’s humility as the antidote to human pride highlights how through the intersection of contraries, Christ overcomes sin. It is in and through the contrasts that make up Christ’s salvific work that we can see how divine humility functions, confronting and eradicating pride.

B. Christ the Humble Mediator

A further dimension of Christ’s salvific humility is seen in his role as “mediator between God and humankind” (1 Tim. 2:5). Here Christ’s

humility has a salvific function through the similarity of Christ's humanity and ours:

The mediator between God and man must have something like to God and something like to men, lest being in both things like to men, he should be far from God, or being in both ways like to God, he should be far from men, and so not be a mediator.²⁷

Christ partakes of the human condition in order to become our way of return to God. Through knowledge and imitation of his humanity we are healed, made wise, and, ultimately, united with God.

At the heart of Augustine's understanding of Christ's mediation is the joining of humanity to the divinity in Christ's person: "He has appeared as Mediator between God and men, in such ways as to join both natures in the unity of one Person, and has both raised the commonplace to the heights of the uncommon and brought down the uncommon to the commonplace."²⁸ This new bond between God and humanity is not a joining of equals—the ordinary becomes incorporated into the extraordinary, and through this mingling the ordinary takes on new meaning and possibility. The unity of Christ's person heals and ennobles what has been wounded and disgraced. It is possible not only to be restored to right relationship with God and creation but also to share in the divine life itself, "O, happy fault."

While Augustine maintains his antithetical style within his theology of mediation, it is similarity more than dissimilarity that is emphasized here. In *The Trinity*, Augustine writes, "Just as the devil in his pride brought proud thinking man down to death, so Christ in his humility brought obedient man back to life."²⁹ As the devil mediates death, Christ mediates life.³⁰ The devil's pride is a rebellion against God; Christ's humility is a submission to God. As the antidote to pride, Christ's humility works negatively through confrontation and contrast. But in the context of mediation, Christ's humility works more positively, drawing the sinner closer through similarity and kinship:

But when sin had placed a wide gulf between God and the human race, it was expedient that a Mediator, who alone of the human race was born, lived, and died without sin, should reconcile us to God, and procure even for our bodies a resurrection to eternal life, in order that the pride of man might be exposed and cured through the humility of God; that man might be shown how far he had departed from God, when God became incarnate to bring him back.³¹

As the “God-man,”³² Christ holds an intermediate position that serves to reconcile all that divides God and humanity.

Christ as “the way”³³ demonstrates the active dimension of Christ’s mediation through humility. For it is precisely in his humble humanity that Christ mediates between the unreachable God and creation, joining fallen humanity to his perfect humanity:³⁴ “By reason of the fact that he is equal to the Father, he created us so that we might be; by reason of the fact that he is like us, he redeemed us so that we might not perish.”³⁵

Rather than minimizing the shock of the humble God in his own gnostic culture, Augustine’s teaching on mediation emphasizes God’s earthly, bodily existence. He came to see Jesus Christ’s humility as more than simply an expansion of the spiritualist notions of God. Rather, the humble God inverts and challenges all notions of God as removed from material reality. Fired with a new imagination, Augustine preaches with full rhetorical flourish to proclaim the wonderful paradox of Christ’s birth:

[The Magi] are seeking, though, not a grown man, or one of great age, conspicuous to human eyes on a lofty throne, with a mighty army, spreading terror by force of arms, splendid in purple, with a diadem of dazzling jewels . . . but a newborn baby, lying in a cradle, eager for the breast, not notable for any adornment of the body, any strength of limb, any wealthy parents, or for his age, or for the power of his family.

Showing how Christ is an affront to the expectations of the day, Augustine continues,

[The Magi] are seeking the king of the Jews from the king of the Jews; from Herod they are seeking Christ; they are asking a grown man about an infant, someone famous about someone unknown, someone wealthy about someone needy, someone strong about someone weak; and yet someone contemptuous about someone to be worshiped, one in whom no royal state could be seen, but in whom true majesty was to be worshiped.³⁶

Augustine's theological imagination captures the radically unexpected nature of the Word's descent into the ordinary human experience of weakness and frailty.

In Christ, God chooses to dwell among the lowest in society: the materially poor, the physically poor, and the culturally poor. Although he was equal to the Father, Christ did not come as a powerful ruler or hero. He was born in a stable, in an obscure village; his parents were unknown and undistinguished people of low social standing.³⁷ He slept "in a feeding trough."³⁸ For companions, he did not choose the learned or people of high standing or seek out a privileged social milieu. His first followers were commoners: fisherman, publicans, and artisans (1 Cor. 1:26ff), and he lived among the common folk of Palestine. He reached out to scorned women, the poor, the sick, the lame, and children. As part of his humility, he began his public ministry by suffering hunger in the desert; in the river Jordan he was baptized by John, giving a model of servanthood.³⁹ At the end of his public ministry, he bent down and washed his disciples' feet—a sign of servant leadership. In the institution of the Eucharist, Christ passes on to his followers a reminder of his humility by offering himself to them in the form of ordinary food and drink.⁴⁰

Augustine describes the wood of the cross as the culmination of

the humble pathway to God. The humility of the cross is that which actually moves one to God. In joining their suffering to his, the humble find a direct route to communion with God:

But what good does it do a man who is so proud that he is ashamed to climb aboard the wood, what good does it do him to gaze from afar on the home country across the sea? And what harm does it do a humble man if he cannot see it from such a distance, but is coming to it nonetheless on the wood the other disdains to be carried by.⁴¹

To cling to the wood of the cross⁴² is to surrender to the movement of God, to travel willingly the road of humiliation prefigured for us in the violent rejection of Christ. Drawing from St. Paul, Augustine preaches,

Let your faith board the wood of the cross. You won't be drowned, but borne up by the wood instead. That, yes, that is the way in which the multitudinous seas of this world were navigated by the one who said, *But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Gal. 6:14).⁴³

Preaching on the Gospel of John, Augustine pinpoints the particular way Christ joins his righteous humanity to ours. His humility entails real poverty and suffering. Finding our new identity in him, we must join in this radical humility:

So the one who had such enormous power was hungry, was thirsty, went to sleep, was arrested, beaten, crucified, killed. That's the way; proceed along humility, in order to come to eternity. Christ as God is the home country we are going to; Christ as man is the way we are going by.⁴⁴

Ultimately, Christ's humility points beyond itself, for the way of humility is the starting point and the ongoing means to our final destination in God.

Through his likeness to humanity, Christ joins his humanity to ours, and in this similarity and solidarity “the dissimilarity of our iniquity” is overcome:

The sinner did not match the just, but man did match man. So he applied to us the similarity of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity of our iniquity, and becoming a partaker of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity.⁴⁵

In this description of an exchange Christology, the humility of Christ carries the promise of our redemption, for through it, the eternal God descends to our mortality in order to invite our ascent to immortality. God becomes unlike God so we may receive a new likeness to God. By likeness to Christ’s humility, we are promised the supreme likeness of being adopted sons and daughters in the triune life of God. In creation, we are God’s servants, but in the grace of Christ’s humility we become sons and daughters.

In sum, the humble Christ is the locus for movement from this life to the next. Undoubtedly, the union of humanity and divinity in Christ makes possible this mediating role between humanity and God.⁴⁶ Yet Augustine emphasizes that as the Word made flesh, Christ is the way (*via*); as the eternal Word, Christ is the homeland (*patria*):⁴⁷

Christ the way is the humble Christ (*via Christus, humilis Christus*); Christ the truth and the life is Christ exalted and God. If you walk along the humble Christ, you will arrive at the exalted Christ; if in your sickly health and debility you do not spurn the humble one, you will abide in perfect health and strength with the exalted one.⁴⁸

Augustine’s characterization of the humble Christ as the way can be seen within his depiction of humanity as having strayed from God through pride. Like the Prodigal Son, humanity had lost its way and wandered in obscurity away from its true home. But by his humble

humanity, Christ clears a pathway and invites all to make a return home.

*C. Christ's Humility as Kenosis: Crux illa signum est humilitatis*⁴⁹

Augustine, more directly than any other Church Father, credits St. Paul, "the least" of the apostles,⁵⁰ as the source of his appreciation for Christ's humility.⁵¹ St. Paul taught Augustine that the humility of the Incarnation⁵² is utterly distinct from the teachings and categories of Neoplatonism and other pagan philosophies.⁵³ Sometime during his rereading of Paul's letters in the mid-390s, Augustine is struck in a new way by the humility of Christ's self-emptying. As he reflects on the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), in which Christ's humbling (v. 8) is parallel to his emptying (v. 7), he highlights how Christ's *kenosis* is essential to the meaning of humility. In this humble act of self-emptying love, Christ reveals the very structure of our salvation.

Out of humility, the Son who shares all the divine characteristics with the Father takes on humanity. Without losing divinity, he comes to us in the form of a servant:

He was exalted, you see, from the beginning, because *in the beginning was the Word*. This exaltation is without beginning, without time, because *through him all things were made* (John 1:1-3). So what does the apostle say about it? *Since he was in the form of God*, he says, *he did not think it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil. 2:6); So, *since he was in the form of God*, he did not think it robbery to be equal to God. You have heard about his inexpressible exaltation; now hear about his humility. *He emptied himself*. . . . Not by losing what he was, but by taking on what he was not.⁵⁴

Augustine is clear that Christ does not actually divest himself of divinity because his preexistent divine attributes are not diminished

or compromised in any way. Rather, divine power is exercised in a new mode; paradoxically, the “emptying” is more of an adding than a subtracting.

The Philippians hymn encapsulates the full scope of Christ’s humility, for it describes Christ’s two divine “humblings.” The first humbling is God becoming human—fully entering what is less and sharing earthly limitations. Not grasping at divinity or exploiting his power as God, the Word freely takes on the limits of the human condition. Augustine stresses that this act of humility, in itself, is astounding. In this act of becoming human, the Word forms a new bond between God and humanity. But God’s self-abasement goes even further.

The second humbling—Christ’s suffering and death—demonstrates the consummation of humility: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). Christ’s humble self-emptying extends to suffering the ridicule and abuse of his persecutors who nail him to a cross. The self-emptying that unfolds throughout Jesus’ life culminates in his being condemned and crucified by those he came to save. Without sin, and consequently unbound to the path of human mortality, Christ chose to take on the consequences of our sin. Augustine stresses that Christ’s humility is God’s initiative given in love and generosity for our sakes. He suffers freely and without coercion.

Augustine tries to understand why God chose to save humanity in such an extreme and costly way. He insists there is nothing haphazard, accidental, or even necessary about the cross. Christ deliberately chose to make himself accountable for our sin through his suffering and death. As God, he was fully in charge and did not need to suffer or die. His humility is pure sacrifice. Highlighting Christ’s free decision to accept the cross, Augustine writes, “It would, after all, have been perfectly easy for him to come down from the cross.”⁵⁵ But by choosing the lowly path, Christ ensures the victory of all subsequent suffering patterned on Christ’s own suffering.

In the second part of Philippians 2, Christ is the recipient of the Father's action of glorification. The receptive dimension of Christ's humility is seen in his total openness before the Father who exalts him and gives him "the name that is above every name."⁵⁶ Here, Christ teaches us we cannot receive God's Spirit unless we recognize our need for God and freely choose to depend on God. As the eternal doer and receiver of the Father's will, Christ models the agency and receptivity his followers are called to embody in their own lives.

Augustine explains that the second part of Paul's pericope describes the depth of God's love for us and the full extent of the Word's self-emptying. Christ's submission to humiliations, torture, and death demonstrates the full meaning of the first part of the hymn. His death is the completion of the *kenosis* that is first revealed in the Word made flesh. Preaching on this hymn, Augustine explains that if Paul stopped the hymn at verse 8, the explanation of Christ's humility would be incomplete:

[Paul] wouldn't have defined the full measure of [Christ's] humility yet, if he hadn't added, *death too on a cross* . . . he took upon himself, something peculiarly disgraceful, in order to provide a reward for those who are not ashamed of this thing, humility.⁵⁷

The cross, then, is not merely an instrument to salvation; it is the precise way God chose to reveal himself and establish our own return to God.

According to the Philippians hymn, the Christian life reflects Christ's self-offering and consists of a voluntary lowering, or abasement, followed by a "raising up," or exaltation, to union with God. The Word gives up exaltation for a time so we might be exalted with him. Christ does not seek his own glory but the glory of the Father, who exalts him above all.⁵⁸ Christ's descent into humanity and, ultimately, into the grave, becomes the road to ascent. Augustine

explains that the foundation of this salvific pattern is humility: “For from death comes resurrection, from resurrection ascension, from ascension the sitting at the Father’s right hand; therefore the whole process began in death, and the glorious splendor had its source in humility.”⁵⁹

It is as one who has been brought low and humiliated to the point of death that Christ asks his followers to be humble. He fully lives out what he calls his followers to live out:

It’s easy enough to think about grandeur, easy enough to enjoy honors, easy enough to give our ears to yes-men and flatterers. To put up with abuse, to listen patiently to reproaches, to pray for the insolent, this is the Lord’s cup, this is sharing the Lord’s table.⁶⁰

On the cross, Christ shows humility in the clearest possible terms. Here, Christ’s perseverance in the agony of the cross expresses that the humility of *kenosis* entails being emptied of all honor and respectability. The humble Christ not only does not cling to his divinity, but also, he does not cling to a human life of honor and enjoyment. Relinquishing all power, Christ willingly suffers the cost of self-offering.

D. Conclusion

First, we considered how Christ’s humility saves through its contrast to pride. Here, Christ’s humility is confrontational but ultimately curative. God’s descent in humility counters the human ascent in pride. This descent serves to both cast down and lift up a fallen humanity. Christ’s humility is salvific because it is from the fundamental disease of pride that humanity needs to be saved.

Second, as the way of humility, Christ fully shares in humanity and mediates salvation through similarity and kinship. Humility finds expression in his humanity and in the particularities of his earthly

life. He chose diminishment and vulnerability in order to join humanity to divinity in his person. Becoming the pathway between God and humanity he made it possible to move in and through the humanity of Jesus to the divinity of Jesus to arrive finally face-to-face before the triune God. Here, Christ's humility is the way (*via*) to salvation.

Last, we considered Christ's saving humility revealed in the unfolding of Christ's self-emptying from the Incarnation to the Passion. The cross is the consummation of Christ's self-surrender and obedience to the Father's will. This dimension of Christ's humility comes to light in Augustine's reflections on Paul's Philipians hymn.

Augustine develops all three dimensions of Christ's humility by using vivid and dramatic metaphors that highlight the rhetorical and dynamic aspects of his Christology. He demonstrates how humility is more than simply moral; it is soteriological, for it describes the very logic of our reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. Through the use of antithesis, Christ is likened to the humble doctor who bends down to his patient administering the medicine of humility to counteract the illness of pride. As the humble mediator, Christ is the road of return to God. And, in the act of *kenosis*, Christ is the culmination of the divine outpouring in creation through his own self-abasement.

In sum, this essay, prompted by the recent sexual abuse scandals, has sought to contribute to the renewal of humility in the Catholic Church today. In a certain sense, every age is at once in need of, and yet resistant to, a rehabilitation of humility. Yet, over and again, Augustine can help us to deepen our conversion through this foundational Christian attribute. His full, theological vision of humility helps us to see more deeply the connection between humility and Christ's salvific work. This connection reminds us the Church itself is rooted in the very humility of God. It is God's humility that calls us to be a church that is unafraid to face the humiliation of having failed to live up to the truth that we proclaim. Much more than a dis-

cipline urged on Christ's followers for their own holiness, humility reflects the very structure of Christ's salvific work and shapes the way that we as Church can participate in our own salvation.

Notes

1. These Church Fathers, who include Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom, are cited in Pierre Adnès, "Humilité," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 7 (1969), 1153.
2. Brian Daley, "To Be More Like Christ: The Background and Implications of 'Three Kinds of Humility,'" *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 27, no. 1 (1995): 1–39.
3. Over the last thirty years, there has been no systematic study of Augustine's teaching on humility. However, two noteworthy twentieth-century works on the topic, prior to the Second Vatican Council, include a thesis by J. Musinsky, *The Humility of Christ in the Thought of St. Augustine*, Gregorian University, Rome, 1947 (unpublished); and Pierre Adnès, *La Doctrine de l'humilité chez S. Augustin* (Toulouse, France, 1953). Cited in D. J. MacQueen, "Contemptus Dei: St. Augustine on the Disorder of Pride in Society and Its Remedies," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 9 (1973), 237–59.
4. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, in Basil Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1997), 52. *Vbicumque etiam inueniuntur optima praecepta morum et disciplinae, humilitas tamen ista non inuenitur. Via humilitatis huius aliunde manat; a Christo uenit. . . . Quid aliud docuit nisi hanc humilitatem?* Original Latin from *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 38:239. Hereafter cited as CCL.
5. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 130. Original Latin from *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–57), 32:745–46. Hereafter cited as PL.
6. Because humility and Christ are so intimately related in Augustine's work, Augustine regarded humility as foreign to the classical pagan world. Although Christians today may affirm (in contrast to Augustine) that various forms of humility exist among non-Christians, the question of whether there are non-Christian analogues to Christian humility was not one that Augustine wrestled with in any detail.
7. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 90, trans. John Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 254; CCL 36:257.
8. E. Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine*, trans. R. J. Bastian (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), 172–73.
9. Augustine, *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1990), Sermon 285.4, pt. III, 8:97–98) Hereafter cited as WSA. *Ubique nobis humilitas magistri boni*

- diligentissime commendatur. Quandoquidem et salus nostra in Christo, humilitas Christi est. Nulla enim nostra salus esset, nisi Christus humilis pro nobis fieri dignatus esset. Meminerimus de nobis ipsis non esse praefidendum. Deo commendemus quod habemus: ab illo imploremus quod minus habemus* (PL 38:1295).
10. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 412.
 11. WSA, Sermon 285.4 pt. III, 8:97–98.
 12. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, in in R. Arbesmann, “Christ the *Medicus Humilis* in St. Augustine,” *Augustinus Magister* II (1955): 627; PL 36:353.
 13. WSA, Sermon 196A.1, pt. III, 6:64.
 14. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 81.
 15. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, trans. Matthew O’Connell and Michael Pellegrino in *Give What You Command: Augustine’s Reflections on the Christian Life* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), 52. *Quia per superbiam recesseramus a Deo, redire ad eum nisi per humilitatem non poteramus, et quem nobis praeponeremus ad imitandum, non habebamus. Omnis enim mortalitas hominum superbia tumuerat. Et si existeret aliquis humilis vir in spiritu, sicut erant prophetae, patriarchae, dedignabatur genus humanum imitari humiles homines. Ne ergo dedignaretur homo imitari hominem humilem, Deus factus est humilis, ut vel sic superbia generis humani non dedignaretur sequi vestigia Dei.* (CCL 38:276).
 16. WSA, Sermon 123.3, pt. III, 4:245.
 17. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 15.
 18. WSA, Sermon 142.5, pt. III, 4:416. *Audi apostolum dicentem: audi, ut dixi iam dudum, ne desperatione frangaris: audi quomodo amatus es non amandus, audi quomodo amatus es turpis, foedus, antequam esset in te quod amari dignum esset. Amatus es prius, ut dignus fieres qui amareris.* Original Latin from *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, Supplementum*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857–64), 2:729. Hereafter cited as PLS.
 19. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 15.
 20. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 253–54. *Uides hominem qui fuit ulcerosis et scabiosus, sanatum; sed quia humor ille non eiectus est, rursus ad ulcus reditur. Cognoscens hoc medicus, purgat humorem, detrahit causam, et nulla erunt ulcera. Vnde abundat iniquitas? Per superbiam. Cura superbiam, et nulla erit iniquitas. Vt ergo causa omnium morborum curaretur, id est superbia, descendit et humilis factus est Filius Dei* (CCL 36:256–57).
 21. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*: “*non solum fouere, sed et secare et urere*” (CCL 39:1184).
 22. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill in *The Works of Saint Augustine* vol. I, no. 5 (New York: New City Press, 1991), 361.
 23. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 15.
 24. WSA, Sermon 142.6, pt. III, 4:417.
 25. *Ibid.*, Sermon 88.7, pt. III, 3:423. “It’s as though [Christ] said, ‘You have certainly learned by experience that I was telling you the truth when I said, Don’t touch this

- thing. So anyway, get better, come back to life. I am carrying your infirmity; drink the bitter cup. Those orders of mine which were given to you in good health were easy and pleasant, but it's you yourself that have made them so hard and painful. They were ignored, you have begun to toss about in fever; you can't get better unless you drink the bitter cup, the cup of the trials and temptations this life is full of, the cup of afflictions, of distress, of suffering. Drink it,' he says, 'drink it in order to live.'"
26. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, 53. *Medicus enim erat, et phreneticum curare venerat. Quomodo medicus non curat, quidquid audiat a phrenetico, sed quomodo convalescat et fiat sanus phreneticus, nec si et pugnum ab illo accipiat curat, ille illi facit noua vulnera, ille veterem febrem sanat, sic et Dominus ad aegrotum venit, ad phreneticum venit, ut quidquid audiret, quidquid passus esset contemneret, hoc ipso eos docens humilitatem, ut humilitate docti, sanarentur a superbia* (CCL 38:334).
 27. Augustine, *Confessions*, 219.
 28. Augustine, *Letters*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons in *The Fathers of the Church* 18 (New York: The Fathers of the Church, 1953), 25.
 29. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 162.
 30. Augustine, *City of God*, 361. "In the lower world he was the Way of life, as in the world above he is the Life itself."
 31. Augustine, *Enchiridion* 108, trans. J. B. Shaw (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1961), 126. *Cum uero genus humanum peccata longe separauerunt a deo, per mediatorem qui solus sine peccato natus est, uixit, occisus est, reconciliari nos oportebat deo usque ad carnis resurrectionem in uitam aeternam; ut humana superbia per humilitatem dei argueretur ac sanaretur, et demonstraretur homini quam longe a deo recesserat, cum per incarnatum deum reuocaretur* (CCL 46:107–8).
 32. Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine: A New Translation*, ed. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1882), 287.
 33. John 14:6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."
 34. WSA, Sermon 196A.2, pt. III, 6:65.
 35. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 273.
 36. WSA, Sermon 373.2, pt. III, 10:320–21. *Magi veniunt ab oriente, regem Iudaeorum requirunt, qui tot reges Iudaeorum nunquam antea quaesierunt. Requirunt autem, non aliquem virilis aetatis, sive grandaevum, humanis oculis, in excelsa sede conspicuum, exercitibus potentem, armis terrentem, purpura nitentem, diademate refulgentem . . . sed recens natum, in cunis jacentem, uberibus inhiantem, nullo ornatu corporis, nullis membrorum viribus, nullis parentum opibus, non suae aetate, non suorum potestate praestantem. Et quaerunt regem Iudaeorum, a rege Iudaeorum; ab Herode [homine], Christum [Deum et hominem]; a terreno rege homine, regem coelorum qui condiderat hominem]: a grandi parvulum, a claro latentem, ab excelsa humilem, a loquente infantem, ab opulento inopem, a forti infirmum; et tamen [quamvis ab Herode persequente, sibi et aliis Christum dominantem], a contemnente adorandum: profecto in quo nulla pompa regia videbatur, sed vera majestas adorabatur* (PL 39:1664).
 37. Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 307.

38. WSA, Sermon 189.4, pt. III, 6:36.
39. *Ibid.*, Sermon 52.1, pt. III, 3:50.
40. *Ibid.*, Sermon 78.6, pt. III, 3:343. "Life came down, to be killed; bread came down, to go hungry; the way came down, to grow weary on a journey; the fountain came down, to experience thirst; and are you refusing to endure toil?"
41. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 167. *Hinc enim sibi purgationem isti uirtute propria pollicentur quia nonnulli eorum potuerunt aciem mentis ultra omnem creaturam transmittere et lucem incommutabilis ueritatis quantulumcumque ex parte contingere, quod christianos multos ex fide interim sola uiuentes nondum potuisse derident. Sed quid prodest superbienti et ob hoc erubescenti lignum conscendere de longinquo prospicere patriam transmarinam? Aut quid obest humili de tanto interuallo non eam uidere in illo ligno ad eam uenienti quo dedignatur ille portari?* (CCL 50:187).
42. WSA, Sermon 75.2, pt. III, 3:304.
43. *Ibid.*, Sermon 131.2, pt. III, 4:317. *In crucifixum crede, ut fides tua lignum possit ascendere. Non mergeris, sed ligno portaberis. Sic, sic in hujus saeculi fluctibus navigabat ille, qui dicebat, Mihi autem absit gloriari, nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi* (Gal. 6:14) (PL 38:730).
44. *Ibid.*, Sermon 123.3, pt. III, 4:245. *Qui ergo tanta potuit, esurivit, sitivit, fatigatus est, dormiuit, comprehensus est, caesus est, crucifixus est, occisus est. Ista est via: ambula per humilitatem, ut uenias ad aeternitatem. Deus Christus patria est quo imus: homo Christus via est qua imus* (PL 38:684–85).
45. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 155. *Non enim congruit peccator iusto, sed congruit homini homo. Adiungens ergo nobis similitudinem humanitatis suae abstulit dissimilitudinem iniquitatis nostrae, et factus particeps mortalitatis nostrae fecit participes diuinitatis suae* (CCL 50:164).
46. WSA, Sermon 47.21, pt. III, 2:316. "Unde est mediator Dei et hominum; quia Deus cum Patre, quia homo cum hominibus. . . . Divinitas sine humanitate non est mediatrix, humanitas sine divinitate non est mediatrix; sed inter divinitatem solam et humanitatem solam mediatrix est humana divinitas et divina humanitas Christi" (PL 38:310).
47. The figure of "returning to the homeland" is Neoplatonic and common in Augustine's early works.
48. WSA, Sermon 142.2, pt. III, 4:413. *Via Christus, humilis Christus; veritas et vita Christus, excelsus et deus. Si ambules in humili, peruenies ad excelsum; si infirmus humilem non aspernaris, in excelso fortissimus permanebis* (PLS 2:726), (PL 38:778); WSA, Sermon 123.3, pt. III, 4:245).
49. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* (PL 36:1838).
50. 1 Cor. 15:9. See Augustine, *Confessions*, 132.
51. Adnès, "Humilité," 1150.
52. Augustine, *Confessions*, 122.
53. William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought through the Confessions Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 106.

54. WSA, Sermon 265E.2, pt. III, 7:260–61. “*Exaltatus enim ab initio quia in principio erat verbum. Haec altitudo caret initio, caret tempore quia per ipsum facta sunt omnia. Quid ergo de illo apostolus? Cum in forma dei esset, inquit, non rapinam arbitratus est esse aequalis deo . . . Audisti eius altitudinem ineffabilem. Audi et humilitatem. Semetipsum, iniquit, exinanivit. . . . Non amittendo quod erat, sed suscipiendo quod non erat*” (PLS 2:805–806).
55. *Ibid.*, Sermon 87.9, pt. III, 3:412.
56. Phil. 2:9.
57. WSA, Sermon 68.11, pt. III, 3:230. *Tanta dixit, et modum humilitatis ejus nondum terminavit, nisi addidisset mortem autem crucis: hoc enim genus mortis magnum inter Iudaeos habebat opprobrium. Hoc suscepit, quod habebat magnum opprobrium, ut de ipsa humilitate non erubescitibus daret praemium. Quousque pervenit, secans tumorem tuum? Usque ad crucis opprobia* (PLS 2:510).
58. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 255. *Humilitas ergo eius incipit in sermone apostoli, ab eo loco ubi ait: Semetipsum exinanivit formam serui accipiens, et pervenit usque, ad mortem crucis. Claritas uero eius incipit ab eo loco ubi ait: Propter quod et deus exaltauit eum, et pervenit usque, in gloria est Dei Patris* (CCL 26: 602).
59. Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms*, 55. *De morte enim resurrectio, de resurrectione adscensio, de adscensione ad dexteram sessio: hoc totum ergo coepit a morte. Excellentia claritatis huius, principium habet humilitatis* (CCL 40:1611).
60. WSA, Sermon 340A.5, pt. III, 9:299.