

## Augustine of Africa

### Contemporary Lessons from his Postcolonial Struggle against Roman Imperialism and Donatist Fundamentalism

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*Abstract: By generation, cultivation, and election, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) is an African. As an African provincial in the Roman Empire, he is an unimportant outsider; as a member of the Catholic Church in Africa, he is a threatened minority. Thus it is from a uniquely marginal perspective that Augustine criticizes Roman imperialism and Donatist fundamentalism. Yet precisely under these circumstances one can learn valuable lessons about diversity, humanity, and tolerance from his life and legacy. One can do so, however, only if one stops deconstructing one's own Africa and starts reconstructing Augustine's Africa. According to deconstructionist readings of Augustine as a proponent of European hegemony and an opponent of African diversity, he is an aggressive apologist for a capitalist-imperialist-colonialist theology motivated by radical heterophobia and intent on eliminating the precious otherness of alternative Christianities, especially Donatism. But there is a viable alternative to this academic narcissism. Seeking to engage in reconstruction when the prevailing Zeitgeist is to be irrationally enthusiastic about deconstruction, this paper argues that postmodern critics of Augustine are misguided; that the right way to understand the relationship between Augustine and Africa is to recognize the distinction between one's own Africa and his; and that only if one does this is one able to learn important lessons from Augustine about human development in contemporary Africa. Thus emerges a common ground between American postmodernism and Augustinian postcolonialism, and Augustine's life and legacy serve not as a block but as a bridge to intercultural understanding.*

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#### Back to Africa with Augustine: Retrieving his Indigenous Roots

**The question.** In 400/403, in the midst of the great controversy between Roman Christianity and African Christianity that pitted Catholics against Donatists, Augustine protests to an opponent who is trying to make him feel as if he were alienated from his own religion and his own country (*c. litt. Pet.* 3.26.31): “I am an African.” Contrary to what some might think, Augustine is perfectly justified in doing so, and one can learn important lessons about the potential for human development on a postcolonial continent from the exemplary relationship between Augustine and Africa (Fux 2003). Augustine is not a “dead white European male” (“DWEM”) because he is neither European nor white. Nor is he dead, for that matter. Admittedly, and hopefully forgivably, he was male.

**African birth.** Augustine is born in 354 C.E. in the town of Thagaste (modern Souk Ahras, Algeria) in the Roman imperial province of Africa Proconsularis (*conf.* 2.3.5, 4.4.7, 4.7.12). By now this part of Africa has been under full Roman rule since the Third Punic War against Carthage (149–146 B.C.E.) and the Jugurthine War against Numidia (112–104 B.C.E.) (Hugoniot 2000), though it is advisable not simply to read back into that time what the French occupation would much later inflict on Algeria and

Tunisia (Broughton 1929, Salmon 1969). At any given point, formal Roman culture in Augustine's day extends no further than c. 200 miles (c. 300 kilometers) into the interior of these modern countries, while the land beyond the frontier is under the control of Berber kingdoms (Manton 1988, Cherry 1998). But resistance to Roman rule on the periphery of the Sahara Desert and in the mountainous regions of Kabylia and Aurès is only sporadic, and for centuries the whole area from Cyrenaica (modern Libya) to the Atlantic is protected by a single imperial legion (Benabou 1976). Throughout the Roman period, the proverbial wealth of Africa rests on its agricultural production (Lepelley 1979–1981, 2001); the place is a region where large estates in the hands of a few are common and where most medium-sized estates are owned not by Italians but by Roman-Africans (Barton 1972, Raven 1993). Augustine and his family can hardly be described as “settlers” in the politically correct sense that this word often assumes in current debates about who is “native” African and who is not.

**African family ties.** To judge from their names, Augustine's father, Patricius, is Roman, whereas his mother, Monnica, is most likely native to the region and probably even Berber (Monn being an indigenous deity). His family, a colonial legacy possessing curial status (*Possidius, v. Aug.* 1.1), is neither rich



nor poor, but rather middle-class. Indeed, his father must struggle to gather the money required for Augustine's thus delayed higher education (*conf.* 2.3.5). After the death of his father, a wealthy relative, Romanianus, lends financial support to Augustine's educational aspirations (*c. Acad.* 2.2.3).

**African-Classical education.** As a Roman-African, Augustine enjoys elementary education at Thagaste (361–365) (*conf.* 1.9.14 ff.). He attends preparatory school in Madauros (now Mdaourouch, Algeria) (366–369) (*ibid.* 2.3.5), which lies much deeper in Africa and is the hometown of Apuleius (b. 125 C.E.), author of the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, the only Latin novel that survives as a whole. For higher education, Augustine goes to Carthage (now an affluent seaside suburb of Tunis, Tunisia) (370–373) (*conf.* 3.1.1 ff.), which, having been founded (45/44 B.C.E.) on the site of the Carthage of Hannibal that the Romans had destroyed at the end of the Third Punic War, has by this time become second only to Alexandria as an African urban center and second only to Rome as an imperial city of the Western Mediterranean Sea.

**African professional beginnings.** Making a profession of the liberal arts, Augustine teaches rhetoric in Africa and Italy, at Thagaste (373–376) (*conf.* 4.4.7), Carthage (376–383) (4.8.13 ff.), Rome (383–384) (5.8.14 ff.), and Milan (384–386) (5.13.23 ff.). The greater proportion of his professional life is spent in Africa, the lesser in Europe.

**African circle of intimates, friends, associates.** Augustine's unnamed concubine, to whom he remains faithful for about fifteen years and with whom he has a son, Adeodatus (*conf.* 9.4.7, 9.6.14, 9.12.29), is African, or at least Roman-African; when their relationship is ended, she then returns to Africa (*ibid.* 4.2.2–6.15.25). Augustine's best friends, Alypius and Nebridius, are African; both are born and die in Africa (4.3.6, 6.7.11, etc.). His role models for conversion, Marius Victorinus and Antony of Egypt, are African (8.2.3–8.4.9, 8.6.14–8.7.16). So are the members of his circle of friends and acquaintances at the imperial court in Milan (6.10.16–6.11.20). After his conversion, his partners in philosophical dialogue at Cassiciacum (386–387), between Milan and Lake Como, are all Africans (*c. Acad.*, *b. vita, ord.*, *sol.*). In a very human sense, then, Augustine never really leaves Africa.

**Africa the rule, Europe the exception.** In fact, Augustine spends his entire life in Africa except for five years (383–388), which he spends in Italy (*conf.* 5.8.15, 9.8.17), sensitive about his African accent (*ibid.* 1.18.29–1.19.30); he is, at least superficially, familiar with the Punic language (*ep.* 66.108.14, 209.3). Yet who a human being is, is, of course, not merely a matter of geography. More precisely, what one is, is more a matter of culture than of location.

During the heyday of the British Empire, for example, it was common for pious imperialists, colonialists, and capitalists to be born not at the heart but at the extremities of the empire. The case of Rudyard Kipling shows that one can be born in India and be more British than the king or queen of England. And the contemporary case of V.S. Naipaul shows how robust can be the transformational opportunities of gifted individuals born into extensive empires comprising many different cultures, especially then when not all individuals are equally able to benefit from life's special circumstances. So the fact that Augustine was born where and when he was does not suffice to establish credible credentials for him as a critic of Roman imperialism or Donatist fundamentalism. Yet his thoughts, actions, and writings do exactly that.

**Out of Africa.** An outsider to the European empire enterprise, Augustine is not impressed by Rome. For various reasons, he moves from Carthage to Rome in 383. First, he had heard that the Roman students were better behaved, but he would learn the hard way that the Carthaginian pupils were more honest in paying their tuition (*conf.* 5.8.14, 5.12.22). Second, he would have done almost anything to escape the maternal pressure to convert from gnostic Manichaeism to orthodox Christianity (*ibid.* 3.11.19–3.12.21, 5.8.15). Third, and, according to Augustine, decisively, God was leading him from Carthage via Rome to Milan in order to bring him under the influence of Bishop Ambrose (5.8.14–5.8.15, 5.13.23). In Rome, Augustine exploits his Manichean connections (5.9.16–5.10.18), entertains thoughts of Academic skepticism (5.10.19, 5.14.25), and secures the recommendation for an appointment as rhetorician to the imperial court by one of the age's most prominent and virtuous pagans, Symmachus (384) (5.13.23). The remarkable thing about Augustine's account of his odyssey is not so much that he has nothing good to say about Rome. It is, rather, that he hardly mentions the city and certainly does not convey a sense of being impressed by anything about it.

**Indifference to Rome.** In Augustine's account in the *Confessions* (397–401), composed long before the passionate polemic against paganism in the *City of God* (413–427), there is no record, for example, of his ever going even to view the Colosseum, where blood sport for public entertainment would continue long after the majority of the Roman populace had converted from paganism to Christianity and be banned (438) only after his death (430). Alypius, Augustine's "heart's brother" (*conf.* 9.4.7), went there (*ibid.* 6.8.13). There is also no record of Augustine's going to walk the Via Sacra, or to visit the Roman Senate where the noble Cicero, who had once turned him around to philosophy with his *Hortensius* (*conf.* 3.4.7–3.4.8, 8.7.17), had distinguished himself

with words and deeds and saved the *res publica* from the conspiracy of Catiline (63 B.C.E.) (ibid. 2.4.9, 2.5.11). Whatever brought him to the so-called Eternal City (Curran 2000), Augustine's most notable visceral reaction to Rome is to fall violently, almost fatally, ill immediately upon arrival (*conf.* 5.9.16, 5.9.17). It is as if the master of the distinction between literal and allegorical interpretation were hinting that, metaphorically speaking, Rome made him sick. The first chance he gets, he takes, moving on to Milan (384), which, as Mediolanum, had been the administrative capital of the Western Roman Empire since the end of the third century C.E. On his way back to Africa in 387/388, Augustine passes through Rome on his way to its port of Ostia, where his mother Monnica dies (ibid. 9.8.17–9.13.37). This time his account does not mention Rome at all.

**Back to Africa.** It is in Italy, to be sure, that Augustine senses the depth of his unhappiness (384) (*conf.* 6.6.9–6.6.10), takes up and reads the “books of the Platonists” and the letters of Paul (385) (ibid. 7.9.13, 7.20.26, 8.2.3, and 7.21.27, 8.6.14, 8.12.29, respectively), converts to orthodox Christianity (386) (8.8.19–8.12.30), and is baptized (387) (9.6.14). He returns to Africa (387/388) with his entourage, none the less, because they are searching for that place where, they think, they can most effectively serve God (9.8.17): “We were looking for that place where we, who were serving you, Lord, could make ourselves more useful, and thus we all went back to Africa” (“Quaerebamus, quisnam locus nos utilius haberet servientes tibi: pariter remeabamus in Africam”). In connection with his conversion, Augustine renounces not only his profession and his women (at one point he is simultaneously in love with one, engaged to a second, and sleeping with a third: 6.12.21–6.16.26), but also—in a defining gesture of personal anti-imperialism—his prospects for the governorship of a province of the Roman Empire (6.11.19). Knowingly and willingly, Augustine exchanges the verdant foothills of the Alps around Cassiciacum for the relatively arid plains and valleys of Old Numidia. Contemning pleasure, power, and profit, he moves from the center of the empire back to its periphery. After founding and directing a spiritual lay community at Thagaste (388–391) (Possidius, *v. Aug.* 3), he is (almost forcibly) ordained a priest (391) (ibid. 4) and (almost equally forcibly) consecrated a bishop (395/396) at Hippo Regius (modern Bône/Annaba, Algeria) (ibid. 8). After decades of hard work for the African church, Augustine dies at his post (430) while the city is being besieged by the Vandals (ibid. 28–31), a Germanic people who have invaded Africa (429) and will also conquer Carthage (439) (Courtois 1955).

**The answer.** Thus Augustine *is* an African—by generation, by cultivation, and by election. The only

surprising thing about the close connection between Augustine and Africa is that anyone would question it. But that is exactly what a postmodern interpretation of Augustine's life and legacy would try to do. According to self-styled deconstructionist readings of Augustine as a proponent of European hegemony and an opponent of African diversity, he is an aggressive apologist for a capitalist-imperialist-colonialist theology motivated by radical heterophobia and intent on eliminating the precious otherness of alternative Christianities, especially Arianism, Donatism, and Pelagianism, to say nothing of Manicheism and paganism. After all, does he not use the imperial power of the Roman authorities to suppress the religious freedom of, for example, the Donatists?

**A modest proposal.** On the other hand, positing that it takes a great effort to engage in reconstruction when the prevailing *Zeitgeist* is to be irrationally exuberant about deconstruction, this paper argues that the postmodernist critique of Augustine is misguided; that the only way to understand the true relationship between Augustine and Africa is to recognize the real distinction between one's own Africa and his; and that, if one does this, then one may also be able to learn important lessons from Augustine about human development in contemporary Africa. Thus the life and legacy of Augustine can serve not as a block but as a bridge to intercultural understanding.

### Augustine in Historical Context: A Time of Unprecedented Axiological Turbulence

**Seismic shifts.** Augustine lives during terribly troubled times, involving unparalleled crises of values. Within a century, Christianity develops in the Roman Empire from an officially persecuted practice under the regressive Diocletian (284–305) to a legally recognized religion under the progressive Constantine I (312–337) into the established state church under the conservative Theodosius I (379–395) (MacMullen 1981, 1984, 1988, 1997). But Augustine, like others in his time, converts to Christianity before its orthodox doctrines have been fully defined by the great councils of the early Church (Salzman 2002): Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). So he must clear his own path through the forest of heresies such as Arianism, Apollinarianism, and Nestorianism. His efforts are rendered much more difficult by the Donatist schism, the Manichean temptation, and the Pelagian controversy. In addition, soon after Augustine has become bishop of Hippo, special imperial agents come from Rome to Africa to close the pagan shrines (399). As the military emperors of the third century looked to a pious worship of the pagan gods as the cohesive force that would energize the

empire from within against the onslaught of peoples from without, so do the militant emperors of the fourth century seek an analogous force of strength through unity in Christianity (Potter 1994). Catholicism could never have emerged from Christianity without the strong support and massive intervention of the imperial authorities (Cameron 1991, Brown 1992, Drake 2000, Barnes 1981 etc., Barceló 2004, Odahl 2004). Ironically, before the end of the fourth century, the Roman Catholic Church has already executed its first heretics (Priscillianists).

**“If Rome falls, then what can stand?”** Augustine dies as bishop of Hippo Regius in Africa (430) during the dusk of the Western Roman Empire (Marrou 1958, Cameron 1993). As he lies dying, the city is being besieged by the Arian—and thus unorthodox Christian—Vandals under King Gaiseric (c. 390–477), who will eventually conquer the city of Rome (455) (Warmington 1950). In 410 the Visigoths under King Alaric I (c. 370–410) had already conquered the “Eternal City”; in 378 they had also killed Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople (Wolfram 1979/2001, Heather 1996, Barbero 2007, Kulikowski 2007). Thus “barbarism” seems to be defeating “civilization” (Goffart 1980, Ward-Perkins 2005, Heather 2006). The Western Roman Empire falls (476) when the Germanic King Odoacer (c. 435–493) deposes the Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus (r. 475–476). Odoacer, in turn, meets his demise under Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths (c. 454–526), who becomes the first “barbarian” emperor of the Western Empire (493). The city of Rome is conquered for a third (546) and fourth (550) time by the Ostrogoths under King Totila (r. 541–552), after which it becomes essentially a ghost town for several centuries (Demandt 1998, Smith 2005). Yet, if Augustine was perplexed that God seemed to be dispensing with the Roman Empire as an efficient vehicle for the expansion of Christianity at precisely that point in time at which it would be most urgently needed, then he does not show it. To doubt divine providence is, in effect, to distrust God (*civ. Dei* 1.29), and, according to the Judaeo-Christian narrative, distrusting God lay at the root of the original sin of the first human beings, which plunged all human beings into misery and mortality (*ibid.*, Book 13).

**Cosmic changes.** Viewed comparatively, the sack of Rome by the Visigoths on August 24–27, 410, was to *cives Romani* roughly—very roughly—what September 11, 2001, is to citizens of the United States. To be sure, no analogy is capable of capturing the similarities and differences of such complex events. None the less, what these events have in common is that they are the defining cataclysms of their respective times. Thus Augustine lives in times as turbulent as those in which contemporary people

do. Now as then, human beings kill one another on a grand scale in the name of political ideology and religious fanaticism. Now as then, the imperialistic impulse to dominate others whenever, wherever, and however possible is pronounced. Now as then, human beings insecure in their own “fundamental” values seek to assure themselves of them by imposing them on others. How does Augustine, as an African, seek to define the new values? How should one, as an American or European or Asian? How can one learn from him how and how not to go about it? Should the empire “strike back” when it has been provoked? How? Why?

### **African Responses: Augustine on Roman Imperialism and Donatist Fundamentalism**

**Intersection.** The fact that Augustine is both a native African and a Roman citizen implies a special significance for his perspective on the Roman Empire, a *European* imperial enterprise, and on the Donatist schism, an *African* religious movement. In the *City of God (Civitas Dei)* (413/427), a direct response to the sack of Rome by the Goths (410), Augustine, who appears to have been so preoccupied with establishing his reputation for rhetoric that he did not notice the Roman defeat by the Goths at Adrianople (378) (*conf.* 4.2.3–4.3.6), performs a trenchant critique of empire. He argues that the imperialist inclination in the human being is an effect whose cause is an original sinfulness (*peccatum originale*) that yields an evil desire for domination (*libido dominandi*). He claims (1) that by disobeying God the first human beings substantially harmed human nature, especially free will (*civ. Dei*, bk. 13, *passim*); (2) that, as a result, subsequent human beings suffer due to the fact that their flesh cannot obey their spirit (*ibid.*, bk. 14, *passim*); and (3) that, for this reason, they seek to compensate for their own inability to discipline themselves by wielding power over others (*ibid.*, bk. 19, *passim*). Thus human beings seek to dominate others because they fail to control themselves. Augustine illustrates his narrative with a survey of the prevailing imperialist institution, the Roman Empire (*Imperium Romanum*). The critique of empire and the Donatist controversy criss-cross because Augustine, contradicting the African rigorists’ strivings for a pure and perfect church in this world, repeatedly emphasizes that the heavenly city and the earthly city are inextricably intertwined in time and that they will only be sorted out in eternity (1.35, 10.32, 11.1, 15.22, 18.49, 18.54, 19.17, 19.26, 20.5, 20.9, 20.11). A crucial consideration, according to Augustine, is that, although the great majority of human beings are damned in eternity (12.23, 13.23, 14.1, 14.26, 15.3, 15.21, 17.5, 18.48, 18.54, 20.1,

20.26, 21.12, 22.1, 22.22, 22.24), in time no human being can know who will be saved (11.12, 20.7, 21.27). Accordingly, Rome is hardly the anti-Christ (20.19), and many “in” the Church are not “of” the Church (20.9, 21.19–21.22, 21.25–21.27).

**The case against empire.** Neither celebrating nor lamenting its decline and fall, Augustine criticizes the Roman Empire as an unjust regime driven first and foremost by *libido dominandi* (*civ. Dei* 1.pref., 1.30–1.31, 3.14, 4.6, 5.12–5.13, 5.19, 14.15, 14.28, 15.7, 19.14–19.15). Whereas Thucydides thinks that it is human nature to strive to rule over others as far as possible (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.23, 1.76, 5.89, 5.105), as does Hobbes as well (*Leviathan*, ch. 6, 8, 10–11), Augustine believes that the “deviant desire for domination” is a human-all-too-human response to the loss of power over life, death, and everything in between that characterizes the human condition after its lapse from divine grace. In this context, he delivers an apology against the accusation that the rise of Christianity has been the cause of which the effect has been the fall of Rome. His classic theodicy posits that throughout human history bad things have happened to good people and good things have happened to bad people (*civ. Dei* 3.9, 4.2, 5.16, 5.21, 5.26, 20.3, 21.24), and he defends this state of things as a just world order (*ibid.* 1.8–1.29). Hence Christianity is not responsible for the fall of Rome to the Visigoths (1.1, 1.34–1.36); nor has calamity clarified perverse Roman values (1.30–1.33). Before Christ the Romans suffered moral and spiritual calamities (2.3, 2.18–2.19, 2.21–2.22, 2.25), while the pagan gods did nothing to promote their virtue or prevent their vice (2.3–2.27). Given what he holds to be the self-evident righteousness of the new religion (2.28), Augustine argues, should the Romans not reject paganism and accept Christianity (2.29)? Before Christ the Romans endured military and physical disasters (3.1, 3.30–3.31), while the pagan gods provided them no protection from such evils (3.1–3.31). Where then were the gods when all this was happening to the Romans (3.17)? Empire extended by war yields not security but anxiety (4.3), since rule without justice is robbery and generals without legitimacy are gladiators gone global (4.4–4.5). Nor can the extension and duration of the Roman Empire (or of any other human empire) be ascribed to the many different pagan gods, because this “crowd of deities” (*turba deorum* or *multitudo numinum*: 3.17, 4.8–4.9, 4.11, 4.16, 4.20–4.21, 4.23, 4.34, 5.Pref., 5.26, 7.2, 7.4, 7.24) was unable to regulate even the most trivial things (4.6–4.32). On the contrary, the good accomplished by the Roman Empire, which is also not a matter of blind fate (5.1–5.11), must be ascribed to the Christian God, who governs individual happiness and collective prosperity (4.33–4.34, 5.11–5.26).

Again, moral and material disasters struck Rome before Christ, so that they cannot have been the result of the Christian religion (4.2, 4.7, 4.29). Indeed, pagan Rome fell to the Gauls (490 B.C.E.), whereas Christian Rome was saved from the Goths (405/406 C.E.) (3.29, 5.23). As a result, neither the decline of the Roman Empire nor the fall of the city of Rome is etiologically related to “Christian times” (*tempora Christiana*: 1.1, 1.7, 1.15, 1.30, 1.33, 3.22, 3.31, 5.22, 13.19). Accordingly, the inference of “post hoc ergo propter hoc” is exposed as a fallacy. Actually, as far as Augustine is concerned, the question whether there is a relationship of cause and effect between the rise of Christianity and the fall of Rome is not a difficult one. Rather, his own profound concern is the apparent lack of purpose to be found in the fact that the empire was clearly collapsing at precisely that point in time at which it would have been poised to offer the greatest assistance in the further extension and final victory of “the one true religion”. What is striking, however, is the restraint that Augustine—as distinguished from some of his more sanguine predecessors or contemporaries, for example, Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* [303–325]) and Orosius (*History against the Pagans* [417–418]), who had succumbed to the temptations of intelligent design and empire theology—shows in refraining from any argument to the effect that God had let the Roman Empire rise and shine in order to use it as a fitting but unwitting instrument for the globalization of Christianity. He resigns himself to the fact that human beings do not and cannot understand divine purposes (*civ. Dei* 1.28, 2.23, 2.29, 4.7, 4.17, 4.31, 4.33, 5.19, 5.21, 12.15–12.16, 12.28, 18.18, 20.1–20.2, 20.7, 20.19, 21.13). Above all, Augustine scorns the hypocrisy of those pagans who can allege Christianity to be the source of the evils afflicting Rome only because they have survived the Visigoths’ conquest of the city by taking refuge in the churches whose sanctuary the victors respected (*ibid.* 1.3, 1.34, 3.31), though he cannot bring himself to credit the barbarians with being Christians, since they are Arians.

**The case for empire.** It would be an error, however, to think that Augustine regards the relationship between the city of God and the city of Rome as inherently antithetical. In what amounts to a defense of empire rather than an attack on it, Augustine suggests that it was not such a bad thing that so many human beings came to enjoy the benefits of Roman citizenship, although it would have been better, he concedes, if it had happened not through conquest but through consent (*civ. Dei* 5.17). He even argues that it was, in fact, the divine providence of “the one true God” that sanctioned the Roman Empire in its existence, extension, and duration (*ibid.* 4.7–4.9, 4.14–4.25, 4.28–4.29, 4.33–4.34). Divine providence

is supposed to have enabled Roman virtue to build a terrestrial city for human glory and thus to have advanced the celestial city for divine glory (1.36, 4.2, 4.28, 4.33–4.34, 5.Pref., 5.1, 5.11–5.13, 5.18–5.26, 18.2). To be sure, the history of Rome from the Gallic Conquest (390 B.C.E.) to the Gothic Conquest (410 C.E.)—an astonishing 800 years that stops any and every comparison between the *imperium Romanum* and the “American Empire” in its tracks—is a history of war, foreign and civil (3.29). None the less, Augustine urges human beings during their time in this life to take full advantage of whatever semblance of peace the earthly city can provide to further themselves on their pilgrimage to the heavenly city (*peregrinatio* is one of the leading leitmotifs of the work: 1.Pref., 1.9, 1.15, 1.29, 1.35, 5.16, 5.18, 11.28, 11.33, 12.9, 14.9, 14.13, 15.1, 15.5–15.6, 15.15, 15.20, 15.21, 15.22, 15.26, 16.9, 17.3–17.4, 17.13, 18.1–18.2, 18.49, 18.51, 18.54, 21.24, 22.6), and he is convinced that the earthly empire has a positive, albeit limited, role to play in this endeavor (2.19, 19.14, 19.17–19.18, 19.23, 19.26–19.27). Augustine cautions, however, that just rulers do not need to extend their dominion, for it is unjust to wage war to expand empire on the pretext that it is necessary to conquer unjust neighbors in order to make them just, and those who think otherwise are tempted to rejoice at the injustice of their neighbors because it provides them with a plausible *casus belli* (4.15, 19.7). In the long run, there are *two* cities, the earthly city and the heavenly city (14.28). Since human beings are free by nature but enslaved by sin, and especially ensnared by original sin and its penal consequences (bks. 13 and 14, *passim*), it is just for some human beings to rule others and just for some human beings to be ruled by others, at least in the short run (19.12–19.17). Hence even some forms of slavery are supposed to be just (19.15–19.16). Focusing on equitable rule, Augustine claims that the earthly city and the heavenly city can not only mutually tolerate each other in a wary coexistence but also cooperate to attain their own proper ends (19.17). He holds that the plurality and diversity of earthly cities represents not an impoverishment of but an enrichment for the heavenly city, and gives no indication that the heavenly city should strive to undermine or to overthrow any earthly cities (*ibid.*). In light of Cicero’s ideal that there is no *republic* where there is no justice (2.21), Augustine asks the reader to grasp the reality that the Roman “republic” had ceased to exist long before the advent of Christ (19.21, 19.24). Hence Augustine’s critique of empire generally and of the Roman Empire specifically is not an unrestricted attack on political entities. Not all empire is evil, but all earthly empire is ephemeral: “vanitas vanitatum, vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas” (20.3; cf. Ecclesiastes 1.2.3). The final de-

cision about who shall live in the city of heaven or die in the city of hell is supposed to be God’s alone, and his judgments are said to be just but inscrutable (1.28, 2.23, 4.7, 4.17, 11.12, 12.15–12.16, 12.28, 15.6, 18.18, 20.1–20.2, 20.19, 21.13). All are predestined to eternal damnation or eternal salvation (9.21, 12.14, 13.23, 14.10–14.11, 14.26–14.27, 15.1, 17.5, 18.47–18.48, 20.7–20.8, 20.15, 21.24, 22.12, 22.2, 22.16, 22.24), but no one knows to which (11.12, 20.7, 21.27). Accordingly, in a world in which all are presumed guilty until proven guilty and thus deserve eternal punishment in the everlasting fires of hell, and in which few have any prospect of attaining and no chance of earning eternal salvation in the blessed peace of heaven, the consolation of an earthly empire, however temporary, is not to be contemned.

**The Donatist perspective.** Augustine criticizes Donatist fundamentalism as a heresy that denies the purity of the Church (Willis 1950). If one looks beyond the occasions of the Donatist controversy (from the investiture dispute of 307–316 to the Collation of Carthage in 411) and focuses on its causes, then one sees that the altercation between Catholicism and Donatism has less to do with personal, political issues involving “collaborators” or “traitors” and more to do with theological, spiritual questions about the nature of the Church and its relation to the world (Keleher 1961). According to the Donatists, what is special about the Church is its purity, whereas what is distinctive about the world is its profanity. Thus the Church is supposed to represent a society juxtaposed to the world; to include saints but to exclude sinners; and to stand for the sacred as opposed to the secular. The Donatists describe the Church as condemned by the world and the world as contemned by the Church. Hence the Church and the world are mutually exclusive. There is not tranquility but hostility between them. The Church consists of blessed martyrs; the world, of belligerent persecutors. Finally, there is not only a deep link between Donatist fundamentalism and African asceticism but also *prima facie* evidence that, under the influence of Perpetua (d. 203), Tertullian (d. c. 225), Origen (d. c. 254), Cyprian (d. 258), Donatus the Great (d. 355), and Antony (d. 356), the African church sought the moral high ground over the Roman church (Brisson 1958, Hastings 1976).

**The Catholic perspective.** Convinced that to be human is to be sinful, Augustine argues, in twenty-one anti-Donatist works between 393/394 and c. 420, that the Church is a mixed body of saints and sinners; that every human being contains a unique blend of cleanliness and pollution; and that the sacred and the profane must coexist until Christ comes again. Thus the Donatists are the rigorous puritans and the Catholics are the tolerant moderates. Augustine accepts

Catholicism and rejects Donatism. In regard to the Catholic Church, he champions unity, charity, and diversity over purity, severity, and uniformity; in regard to the Donatist schism, he challenges the exclusivism of those who sacrifice the former to the latter. As a confessed sinner, Augustine takes an approach to the nature of the Church that is based on inclusion of fallen spiritual otherness. As a convert, priest, and bishop, he presents himself as someone who is still struggling with his sexual fantasies, or at least with the memory of them (*conf.* 10.29.40, 10.31.45, 10.35.56, 10.37.60). As a bishop whose consecration was a technical violation of ecclesiastical law (Possidius, *v. Aug.* 8.1–8.5), Augustine's position would have been *prima facie* suspect in the eyes of the Donatists, the original occasion for the schism having been precisely a controversy about the validity of a bishop's consecration.

**Ends, means, opportunity.** Given the political and religious conflict between the two churches in Africa, it is understandable that Augustine, playing a major part in the development of orthodox Christian theology, appeals to the imperial Roman authorities to defend the Catholic Church from the Donatist schism (Merdingner 1997). After all, Donatism is, at least in part, an ethnic Berber protest against Roman rule as well as a regional rebellion of relatively poor and rural Numidia (perhaps best exemplified by the “circumcellions”) against relatively prosperous urban centers such as Carthage and Hippo (Frend 1952/1985). One of the most curious twists of his troubled times is the fact that the fall of the city of Rome to the Visigoths in 410 does not prevent Augustine from doing everything in his power to bring the full weight of imperial authority to bear against the Donatists at the Collation of Carthage in 411. On the contrary, it is as if he appreciates, now more than ever before, how the impending demise of Rome actually heightens the urgency of using Roman power against the opponents of the Church so long as there is still time to do so (O'Donnell 2005). So Augustine argues that disaster has struck the empire, not because it had neglected the old rites, but because it had tolerated not only paganism but also heresy in the new Christian commonwealth (*civ. Dei* 18.41, *ep.* 137.5.20).

### **From Ancient Carthage to Contemporary Africa: Augustinian Reflections on Imperial Hegemony and Religious Sanctimony**

**Traces.** On the occasion of the Fourth International Humanities Conference 2006 one has the opportunity to visit the continent of Africa, the land of Tunisia, and the city of Carthage. Walking “in the footsteps of Augustine” among the ruins of this ancient metro-

polis (Charles-Picard 1965), one can better understand his life and times. For example, one can engage in reflection on the Acropolis (Bursa Hill) with its spectacular view of the Mediterranean Sea, once enjoyed by both the Carthaginian Barcas and the Roman Scipios; in the Amphitheater, where Augustine's friend Alypius lived out his addiction to the gladiatorial spectacles (*conf.* 6.7.11–12), and where the revered African saints Felicity, Perpetua, and Cyprian were martyred (the first two in 203 and the third in 258); in the Baths of Antoninus Pius, where Augustine surely spent leisure time (he thought public baths were great places to engage in philosophical dialogues: *c. Acad.* 1.4.10, 3.1.1, 3.4.9); in the Roman Theater, where literature became life for him in full view of the sea that would carry him to Rome itself (*conf.* 3.2.2–3.2.4); in the School District, where he probably taught his pupils rhetoric in rented space (*ibid.* 4.8.13 ff.); in the Baths of Gargilius, where the great debate between the Catholics and the Donatists took place (at the Collation of 411); at the Walls of Theodosius, which were once stormed by the Vandals (439) taking the long path to Rome (455); at the Bardo Museum in Tunis, where one is overwhelmed by the extensive mosaic evidence of the fabulous wealth of Roman Africa; and, last but not least, in the almost sacred space between the Shrine of St. Cyprian and the commercial harbor, where Monnica anguished through the night when Augustine lied to her and left her for Rome (383) (5.8.15).

**Where was “God”?** One is also able to take advantage of this experience of the remnants of Augustine's world to enhance one's understanding of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) that has occurred between Augustine's time and the present. In 647–665, Arab reconnaissance campaigns, bringing Islam, a religion which denies the divinity of Christ more dogmatically than even the Arians ever did, reach his former homeland (Holme 1898/1969). In 698, the Arabs seize Carthage from the Byzantine Empire. This is a prelude to the systematic Arab conquest of all of Tunisia. In 1270, King Louis IX of France leads a crusade to Tunisia and dies under the walls of Tunis. After a period of domination by the Ottoman Empire (1574 ff.), Tunisia falls under the economic, military, and political hegemony of the French Empire (1881 ff.). The French try to bring the country back to Christianity, but Tunisia retains its religion and regains its independence (1956). The French involvement with Algeria would, by some standards, be more chronic, drastic, and tragic. The French invade and occupy Algeria in 1830, but resistance is never extinguished. In the final phase (1954–1961), c. 100,000 Muslim fighters and c. 10,000 French soldiers are killed, as

well as thousands of natives and colonists. Algeria secures its independence from France in 1962.

**Lessons on the ground.** Here one would like to share some personal impressions from the direct experience of ancient Carthage and modern Tunisia. The purpose is to suggest ways in which one can draw transcultural and transtemporal lessons about diversity, humanity, and tolerance from reflection on the past and its retrieval for the future. In general, one is impressed by the cosmopolitan character of the population as well as by their peculiar synthesis of African and European characteristics. In particular, one is astonished that the fin-de-siècle French colonizers had attempted to reintroduce Christianity to the country with their St. Louis Cathedral on Bursa Hill near the ancient acropolis of Carthage. Especially one must admire the temperance and tolerance of the Tunisian people, who have adopted a moderate form of Islam despite the fact that they would have had many reasons to resent Christian imperialism.

**Democracy vs. theocracy.** Extending the horizon, one focuses on the “Augustinian Triangle”: Thagaste–Carthage–Hippo. The inhabitants of this territory, which, geographically speaking, includes large parts of Algeria and Tunisia, have been making painstaking progress toward a deeper appreciation for diversity, humanity, and tolerance. These countries are struggling with problems of “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria 2003). Their peoples seek to devise constitutional ways to reconcile the expectation of majority rule with the protection of minority rights. After all, if 51% of the voters want a fundamentalist Islamic republic, then 100% of the females may end up under the veil. That is not democracy. Of course, Algeria and Tunisia are two different countries, and the latter does not have the recent internal history of violent religious faction of the former, where between 1992 and 1999 alone c. 100,000 people were killed in a violent attempt to establish or to suppress an Islamic theocracy. The civil strife has not yet completely subsided, and the ethnic tension between the Arab majority of Algeria (who constitute c. 70% of the population) and the Berber minority of Kabylia (who, located in the south and central interior of the country, constitute c. 30% of the population of Algeria) has only begun to emerge. Yet, as the lethal terrorist attack on the synagogue on the Tunisian island of Jerba (2002) shows, no one is immune from the evil effects of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

**Migratory patterns, ancient and modern.** Underway today is also a kind of *Völkerwanderung* in reverse—in Augustine’s time the intruders usually came from the north to the south. Indeed, there is a deluge of human beings seeking exit from North Africa and entry into Southern Europe, and the open Mediterranean Sea has become a perilous path for

them. In the European and African presses, hardly a week passes without news of another ship full of refugees washing up on the shores of the Italian islands of Lampedusa, Pantelleria, and Sicily, or, worse, of one sinking beforehand with a large loss of life. Invariably, the Africans are seeking relief from the political, economic, and social ills of their home countries. The law of supply and demand is such that, no matter how dangerous and expensive the journey becomes, there will be a steady flow of people willing to undertake the trip as well as to transport others for a handsome profit. By the summer of 2004, one of the acute issues in the countries of the European Union, for example, in the Germany of Interior Minister Otto Schily, is whether to attempt to organize “collection camps” in North African countries in order to prevent Africans from trying to risk the trip across the Mediterranean Sea. For, if they are not allowed to try to get across, then they will also never reach Europe. But one has to wonder whether it would not make more sense to exert greater energy on solving the problems that pressure these people to migrate in the first place.

### From Ancient Rome to Contemporary America: From a Dying Empire to an “Empire in Denial”

**Return of empire.** Augustine strongly criticizes both Roman imperialism and Donatist fundamentalism. He does so from a uniquely African perspective, not from the center of things but from their periphery (Rowlands 1987). As a member of the Catholic Church in Africa, he is, at least at first, a threatened minority. As an African provincial in the Roman Empire, he is, at least at first, an obscure outsider. Especially for these reasons, one can learn lessons about diversity, humanity, and tolerance from his life and legacy. One can do so, however, only if one makes an honest effort to stop deconstructing one’s own Africa and to start reconstructing his Africa. Otherwise one never leaves postmodern America. Then Augustine’s postcolonialism gets lost in the mist of American imperialism. But there is a viable alternative to this academic narcissism. Empire studies are back, and they are big (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, Bryan 2005, Crossan 2007). A question about the common ground between Augustine scholarship and empire studies yields a question about the relationship between Rome and America.

**Lines, cycles, lessons.** One may consider a contemporary adaptation of Plutarch’s narrative of the life of Crassus (*Lives* 14.2): According to Plutarch, Marcus Licinius Crassus was an ambitious and avaricious Roman who was born into one fortune and handed another. His arrogance was exceeded only by his ignorance, and his trademark talent was for

ingratiating himself with ordinary people by deliberately cultivating an aura of unaffectedness and approachability. He further enhanced his reputation as a populist by arranging massive transfers of state revenues that had the short term effect of easing few private budgets and the long term effect of ruining many public finances. Having ascended to lofty office on the basis of personal connections, Crassus, sensitive to the enviable military reputations of his fellow statesmen Caesar and Pompey, had an acute need to distinguish himself as a commander-in-chief. The desire to augment his power drove him to invade Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris River and the Euphrates River, during a crucial time in the history of Rome, that is, its transformation from republic to empire. The usual hostile actions along the border between the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire served as a pretense for the illegal war not of necessity but of choice that did not fulfill the criteria of a just or justifiable war. Although Crassus, at the head of the most powerful army in the world, was swiftly able to disperse many enemy forces and to occupy much hostile territory, as well as quickly to proclaim “Victory Achieved” in front of his troops, he soon found himself without a viable plan to govern what he thought he had conquered. Intent and effect had diverged, and his actions had plunged the common people of the region into such chaos that it was impossible to guarantee the safety of their persons or the security of their possessions. Worse yet, after the brief beginning marked by a stunning success, Crassus found it increasingly difficult, indeed, virtually impossible, to force his innumerable, ubiquitous, and elusive enemies, who had made a surprising recovery from their initial setbacks, to stand and fight a conventional war. No matter what the Romans did, they could not get the Parthians to attack them in a frontal assault. Instead, the mobile Parthians (from whom some modern Iraqis are descended) tenaciously engaged the stodgy Romans in a form of asymmetric warfare that left little doubt in the minds of critical observers about the ultimate outcome. The Romans could neither pursue nor escape the Parthians, whose lethal projectiles pierced the body armor of their hapless targets in an unstoppable fashion. Soon many more Roman soldiers had been killed in battle after the unilaterally declared “victory” than before. Others, understandably reluctant to be the last men to die for another man’s mistake, began to think more of their own safety than of the duties demanded of them by their commanders. Some resorted to war crimes and other atrocities in their frustration at a chronic situation from which there was no clear exit. All this reduced even further their already diminished effectiveness. In the end, having overreached himself and underestimated his adversaries, as well as having ignored the advice of

many of his counsellors until it was far too late, Crassus was defeated, captured, and executed at Carrhae, near modern Iraq, in 53 B.C.E. Rome reacted with shock and awe, since no one had been able to imagine that such a calamity could befall such a superpower.

**Application and understanding.** What does Rome have to do with America (Johnson 2006)? Would it have been a proper and prudent response to the Gothic sack of Rome for the imperial powers to dispatch the bulk of the Roman legions to the Parthian front in Mesopotamia? Does the Iraq War make sense as a response to the war that Al-Qaeda did indeed declare on the United States and *res Americanae* (Wright 2006)? The Roman historian Tacitus attributes to the Briton Calgacus in his exhortation to his soldiers the following remarks (*Agri-cola* 30 [85 C.E.]): “[The Romans are the] robbers of the world [*raptores orbis*], having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy is rich, then they are avaricious; if he is poor, then they are ambitious; neither the East nor the West has been able to satisfy them. Alone among all men they covet with equal passion [*pari adfectu concupiscunt*] poverty as much as wealth. Plundering, butchering, stealing—these things they call by the false names of ‘empire’, and where they make desolation, they call it ‘peace’ [*Auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*].” Is the United States making a wasteland in Iraq and calling it “freedom” (Cockburn 2006)? The infallible lesson that history teaches is that it is possible both to learn from history and not to learn from history (Fukuyama 1992, 2006).

**Imperial virtue and vice.** In general, one would do well to recollect that the United States of America, with its gerrymandered voting districts, its disenfranchised scheme of representation, and its entrenched system of legislation by lobby, not to mention its chronic voter fraud (cf. Jimmy Carter to the *Washington Post*, Sept. 27, 2004, on the upcoming election in Florida: “... some basic international requirements for a fair election are missing ...”), is hardly a paragon of democratic procedures. This country, too, has a lot to learn from other peoples, cultures, and religions, even as it seeks to teach them lessons without reflecting on what its own imperialist tendencies tell it about itself (Kaplan 2002). One cannot export America and call it “freedom”, certainly not to Africa. Like Augustine’s Rome, imperial America needs first and foremost to find its way back to the “soft power” (Nye 2002, 2004) of exemplary republican virtue. Until then, it should be much more mindful of its own moral vulnerability and much more careful about holding itself forth as a model for others to emulate (Kupchan 1994, Johnson 2000,

Bacevich 2002, Kupchan 2002, Etzioni 2004, Johnson 2004). What many foreigners are liable to reject, is not so much the ideals of freedom and democracy, as rather the hypocritical manner in which some Americans then seek to implement them when they operate with a double standard.

**What about Africa?** In particular, one should beware of those politicians who would frighten ordinary Americans into believing that sinister foreigners hate them for who they are and not for what their inept government does (Barber 2003). Thus it is facile and false to say of Islamic fundamentalists that they hate America because they hate “freedom”, whereas it is accurate and discomfiting to say that they hate this country because of the unjust policies that it consistently implements in the Middle East (Anonymous 2004). All policy is global. For example, one of the reasons why the government of the United States presently lacks leverage with the government of Sudan in the Darfur crisis is the former’s precipitous bombing of Khartoum in response to the American embassy bombings by terrorists in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, a response which is now generally accepted to have been misguided. The present U.S. administration is also guilty of fallacious logic when it argues, as it does repeatedly, that Libya has forsaken state-sponsored terrorism as a foreign policy method “because” of the “success” of the American invasion of Iraq, as though Libya should fear that the United States might try to do to it what it evidently cannot do to Iraq. Finally, the decisive consideration that led the United States to refrain from action during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was the terribly botched attempt to capture the Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid in 1993, which resulted in the deaths of 18 American soldiers and of a staggering number of Somalis, many of whom were non-combatants. For far too long, the unofficial foreign policy of the United States has been to treat northern and Islamic Africa as an annoying appendage to the Middle East.

**The imperialist in denial.** In a television interview with Al Jazeera on February 27, 2003, Donald Rumsfeld, then the Secretary of Defense of the United States, was asked: “Would it worry you, if you go by force into Iraq, that this might create the impression that the United States is becoming an imperial, colonial power?” He answered: “Well, I’m sure that some people would say that, but it can’t be true because we’re not a colonial power. We’ve never been a colonial power. We don’t take our force and go around the world and try to take other people’s real estate or other people’s resources, their oil. That’s just not what the United States does. We never have and we never will. That’s not how democracies behave. That’s how an empire-building Soviet Union behaved but that’s not how the United

States behaves.” It would be better simply to concede what is self-evident, namely, that the United States is both an imperial and an imperialistic power, and to work from there (Kagan 2003/2004, Münkler 2005, Joffe 2006, Kagan 2006, Kegley and Raymond 2006, Maier 2006).

**The “empire in denial”.** Without being able to admit it, the United States of America strives for axiological hegemony based on its idiosyncratic conceptions of such values as “freedom”, “democracy”, and “commerce” (Ferguson 2004). But its idea of “freedom” involves the license to flood the world with hard-core pornography via the internet. Its idea of “democracy” involves the power to exploit a “republican” system of federal government that does not represent the majority. And its idea of “free trade” is so selective as to reduce itself to the absurd. As James Madison predicted in *The Federalist No. 10*, the empire of the United States of America is ruled, not by a harmonious majority, but by factious minorities, one of which wanted and got the Iraq War, a conflict that hinders the war on terrorism and exacerbates the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East (Galbraith 2006).

**After history.** Critical inquiry inspired by Augustine’s thoughts on political imperialism and religious fundamentalism challenges all Americans to avoid the mistakes of imperial hubris, of spiritual intolerance, and of foreign affairs Manicheism (Carter 2005, Albright 2006). Such reflection can also help to prevent policy makers from falling into the error of thinking that they know things that they do not, for example, that in 2003 Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, that his regime was working with Al Qaeda on September 11, 2001, and that Iraq posed an imminent threat to the national security of the United States (Blix 2004). (The argument that Saddam Hussein’s regime was brutally unjust, as it was, cannot serve as an adequate justification for the Iraq War—cf. again Augustine, *civ. Dei* 4.14, 19.7.) Basing crucial policy decisions on such supposed “knowledge”, decisions that cost countless human beings their own lives and the lives of their loved ones, is not only politically irresponsible but also criminally negligent. In an interview conducted for his book *Plan of Attack* on December 11, 2003, Bob Woodward asked President George W. Bush (p. 443): “How would history judge [your] Iraq War?” Woodward describes how Bush answered: “[He] smiled. ‘History’, he said, shrugging, taking his hands out of his pockets, extending his arms out and suggesting with his body language that it was so far off. ‘We won’t know. We’ll all be dead.’” Whatever he meant to say, what he is saying is that he will sooner be history than learn from it.

**Imperial illegitimacy.** One can learn only from what one understands. To understand, George W.

Bush badly needs to expand his historical horizon. He desperately needs to reflect on how Western empires, ancient and modern, have treated Africa and Asia, ancient and modern. He urgently needs to read Augustine, who has some crucial advice to offer on how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past that involve wandering in circles of one's own making (*civ. Dei* 12.11–12.20). Maybe then Bush will discover that the whole world, including Africa, does not revolve around his “vision” for the Middle East (Khalidi 2004). Maybe then he will also stop rejoicing every time he thinks he has identified a new member of the “axis of evil” (Cumings et al. 2004). Maybe then he will realize that to extend empire on the pretext of evil is to elevate evil to good and is therefore itself evil (*civ. Dei* 4.15). Bush wants to be a president not of evil but of good, but intent and effect are sometimes two very different things (Singer 2004). Anticipating Bush's speech at the United Nations on Sept. 21, 2004, Kofi Annan, then the secretary-general of the organization, a native African (the first sub-Saharan African to hold the office, after the Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the first African and Arab to lead the U.N., was forced from office by the U.S.) as well as a Nobel Peace laureate, said that the United States is involved in an “illegal” war in Iraq (BBC-News Interview, Sept. 16, 2004). Legitimacy, like innocence, is, once lost, the most difficult thing in the world to regain. And, as Augustine tries diligently to teach us from the

history of Rome, nothing is more illegitimate than military might without moral right.

**Desideratum.** The standard one-volume reference work on Augustine's life, labor, and legacy seeks to be comprehensive but lacks articles on the topics “empire”, “Rome”, and “Roman Empire” (Fitzgerald 1999). If the present essay has succeeded in establishing the prima facie relevance of Augustine's contribution to crucial contemporary concerns in the field of empire studies, then it will have served its purpose. At this point, what remains to be written is a serious study of Augustine's general etiology of human imperialism as well as of his special theory of Roman imperialism, where each of these phenomena is understood as an elaborate expression of that depraved desire for domination (*libido dominandi*) which is rooted in original sin (*peccatum originale*). Such a study would investigate Augustine's account of imperialism with a view to determining whether and to what extent it is theologically motivated, anthropologically justified, and philosophically tenable. It would also judge whether the evidence for his theory, both the empirical evidence from secular history and the speculative evidence from salvific history, is sufficient to meet the burden of proof required in the humanities. It would, finally, challenge Augustine's clarification of human imperialism by contesting his theologically foundational but empirically unsustainable doctrine of “original sinfulness”—a notion that he virtually invented (*Simpl.* [396]).

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