# PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

## THE ECUMENICAL IMPLICATIONS
## OF AUGUSTINE'S *DE CATECHIZANDIS RUDIBUS*

Matthew L. Lamb (Boston College) chaired the workshop on patristic theology. The convener and presenter was Kenneth B. Steinhauser (Saint Louis University) and the respondent Joseph T. Lienhard (Fordham University).

### Part I: Reason and Personalism

Steinhauser began his presentation by asserting that three aspects of Augustine's thought are profoundly ecumenical: (1) his quest for a unified and consistent world view, (2) his understanding of person in community, and (3) his dialectical approach to reality.

First, since both the catechetical *De catechizandis rudibus* and the apologetic *De ciuitate Dei* present the same message, one may conclude that there should be a single, clear, consistent, and simple statement of Christian truth for all. For those inside the Church as well as for those outside, there must be a coherent theology based upon what all human beings have in common—reason. Augustine deals with the epistemological question in the second chapter of *The Catechizing of the Uninstructed*, where he writes of the limitations of language or *locutio* in its relationship to understanding or *intellectus*. According to Augustine, although language is always an inadequate expression of understanding, it serves understanding. Understanding is inside, in the mind, while language is outside, in the body. Understanding is primary. These conclusions were based on the recent doctoral dissertation of Johannes van Oort entitled *Jerusalem and Babylon*, which had demonstrated the close affinity between catechesis and apologetics in the thought of Augustine.

Second, Steinhauser analyzed the paradigm of the two cities as a principle of interpreting the history of the inhabited world. The *ciuitas*, like the ancient Greek *polis*, was formed by its citizens, the *ciues*. Since there can be no city without citizens, the use of the word *ciuitas* implies an anthropological basis to Augustine's approach. There is a significant parallel to the word "ecumenical" which finds its root in the Greek word *oikein* meaning "to inhabit." The *oikoumene* of Irenaeus is not the geographic *orbis terrarum* of Cicero but rather the inhabited world. The *oikoumene*, then, is just as anthropologically based as the *ciuitas* with each emphasizing neither territory nor geography but human beings. Both *oikoumene* and *ciuitas* refer exclusively to inhabited places so that,

should these places no longer be inhabited, these words would no longer be appropriate descriptions. Both *oikoumene* and *ciuitas* by definition imply community. People who live in community then build a society which develops a culture. Just as the citizens of Athens could recall the glorious history of democratic Greece so also the citizens of the new Jerusalem could recall the glorious history of theocratic Israel, where God ruled his people. Thus, the Augustinian city of God is indeed reminiscent of the biblical people of God. The model of the city is ecumenical in the deepest sense of the word because of the genuine communitarian notion implied.

Third, the contemporary ecumenical problem may be described in terms of the age-old philosophical tension between the one and the many carried out on an ecclesial level. Any theological solution to this problem must deal with the question of unity and diversity. Augustine was quite fond of the analogy of the wheat and weeds in Mt 13:24-30, which also played a major role in his anti-Donatist polemic. Just as the wheat and the weeds grow side by side in the field, so also good and evil people live side by side in the world. We do not know who may be a citizen of heaven or who may be a citizen of earth until the end. Just as at harvest time the grain is separated from the chaff by the winnowing fan, so also at the final judgment good and evil people will be separated. Such a dialectical approach could end with the contradictions ultimately being dissolved into a final unity, as for example in Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of *apokatastasis* or recapitulation. For Gregory at the end of time nothing and no one can stand outside the realm of God's love. There will be a complete victory of good over evil. For Augustine the contradictory tensions remain until final judgment. Although Augustine develops no doctrine of *apokatastasis*, in the last section of his *City of God* just as in the last section of his *Confessions* he yearns for the seventh day—the eternal Sabbath of rest with God.

## Part II: De-Hellenization and Interconfessional Dialogue

Lienhard responded by faulting Steinhauser for positing too broad a definition of ecumenism based on popular perception rather than on the decree of Vatican II on ecumenism, which defines ecumenism in terms of "interconfessional dialogue." In this case, then, the circumstances for such a dialogue actually did exit in the early Church. An older view had pictured Christianity as somehow Semitic in nature and deplored its Hellenization, which was usually thought to have taken place in the second century if not earlier. But it is more accurate to speak of a de-Judaization in the first century, and then de-Hellenization and de-Romanization in the fourth and fifth centuries. Lienhard then considered four examples of de-Hellenization: (1) the one and the many, (2) the understanding of biblical and theological language, (3) the cause of history, and (4) the principle of sacramentality.

First, Greek philosophy had long identified the One with the Good. If the One is Good, and if the many are the opposite of the One, then the many may

be identified with evil. The identification is not always made but it is easily slipped into. The Greek doctrine of the one and the many lurked behind the subordinationism of the second and third centuries and Arianism. Only when the intellectual grip on this assumption of Christian theology was broken could an adequate doctrine of the Trinity be elaborated.

Second, Lienhard indicated that throughout the Arian controversy one of the consistent arguments made by the Arian party was that words like "Father," "Son," and "beget" had to be taken not only literally but also univocally. The Arians often preferred clearer, more precise terms like "Unoriginate" and "Originate" to "Father" and "Son." Gradually Athanasius understood that biblical terms were preferable and that they also had to be taken analogically—just as he realized too that the Creed of Nicea and not formal logic was finally the best guide to belief and to the interpretation of Scriptures.

Third, there was a shift from necessity or fate as the cause of history to freedom as its cause. And here again Augustine is one of the best examples. Plato had one republic; Augustine had two cities. For Plato conformity to the ideal is the highest achievement of human history: the ideal is given and the task is conformity. Augustine rather sees free choice as the cause of what happens in the world. And the affirmation that free choice causes history allows Augustine to conceive of his great historical synthesis as two cities. Augustine saw free choice, not as a goal, but as a means, a faculty that is not aroused until an object of choice is presented to it. He thus integrates free choice with the history of sin and the uniqueness of Christ, and with the power of grace and vision.

Fourth, a final example of the advance of Christian doctrine—in this case by de-Romanization—is Augustine's elaboration of the sacraments. In the Donatist controversy considering rebaptism, Augustine distinguished "the Church as it is now" from "the Church as it will be," or the historical from the eschatological Church. He also distinguished the Church as it is now in two planes: the plane of sacraments or external signs and the plane of grace or interior reality. He recognized that the sacraments not only have their own existence but also that they depend upon the act of Christ who instituted them and who remains their *auctor* or subject. Augustine writes of a *communio sacramentorum* and a *societas sanctorum*. Communion is a participation in *things*, here the sacraments; society is a unity of *persons*. The order of communion of the sacraments is the order of participation in corporeal realities. It is the order of the Church on earth since the sacraments are terrestrial. These corporeal realities derive from the work of the word made flesh, from what Christ did "in the form of a slave." The order of the society of saints is the order of participation in spiritual realities: peace, unity, and charity. These spiritual realities derive from the gift and action of the Holy Spirit. Augustine accepted the validity of the sign administered outside the *catholica*, while holding that the reality signified—charity—would be granted only upon the Donatist's uniting himself with the *catholica*.

Thus, Christian doctrine, in the fourth and fifth centuries, reached a certain maturity—one that freed it from some bonds to its Greek and Roman past, and opened it at least to the possibility of a wider ecumenical dialogue.

Further discussion among the participants in the workshop centered on the issues of human free choice and predestination in the thought of Augustine.

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