

ABSTRACT

Learning to See the Signs: How the Incarnation Reveals the Semiotic Nature of Scripture and Reality in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*

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Augustine's treatise on interpreting and teaching Scripture, *De Doctrina Christiana*, in suitably Augustinian fashion, seeks to understand the nature of all reality and how human beings interact with all things, created and divine. Augustine in mapping the structure of Scripture and reality into three categories, things to be used, things to be enjoyed, and things to be used and enjoyed, implicitly reveals his Christocentric understanding of both Scripture and reality. The things to be used are signs. Signs are all things which are not the things to be enjoyed, which is only God. Yet it is not clear how human beings can use those things to enjoy God, unless there is some way in which the things of this world are revealed as sign, and we are shown how to use them. Therefore, the primary argument of this thesis is that the Incarnation of Christ made it possible for humanity to use all things as signs, as "vehicles" for the enjoyment of God. Christ acts as our vehicle, as the path our vehicle follows, and as its destination. He is our model for reading all things as signs toward God. Yet it is through Scripture that we learn to see as Jesus sees, and therefore it is incumbent upon every Christian to be a good interpreter of Scripture so that we may learn to see Scripture and all things as Christ sees them.

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Learning to See the Signs: How the Incarnation Reveals the Semiotic Nature of Scripture
and Reality in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*

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Dedication

To all those who have taught me to see, to read, and to love for the glory of God.

INTRODUCTION

Creation is crisscrossed by billions of tiny threads of various lengths, color, thickness and texture. They are bound together in many patterns revealing innumerable images, both beautiful and tragic. The divine weaver keeps these yards of yarn bound to his loom. The thread is his creation. Therefore, the tapestry is completely and forever his own. Yet the thread has been given the right, the freedom to be woven. The patterns of the created thread are us and our work, yarn worked of its own volition inside the design of the master.

There are consequences to the will of many minds irreversibly working themselves out on the weave of reality. We bind all creation with our hysterical sewing, weaving, knitting, and binding, wrapping the world like a mummy in threads of desire, passion, brokenness, and finitude. Though the created thread is dependent upon the divine design, the loom holding all together through the skill of the master, the created seems a sporadic, messy thing. Despite its billions of stitches, it comes to naught, often falling away from the divine fabric.

Yet there is one person who holds the ends of every thread, holds together the divine and human activity. Pierced by the needles, head, hands, feet, side, back, all threads come to rest in him. The weaver enters the tapestry. By his action, his body, his life, the divine fabric and the created thread are brought together, bound fast. It is by his blood that the true colors of each and every thread are brought forth from its perpetual covering of the dust of war, the stains of death, and the clinging particles of sin. The

pattern is revealed. The works of all those millions of hands, the turbulence of thousands of years of living, the threads of a hundred billion lives are revealed to have been woven into one cohesive pattern, into an image of one life: Christ's life.

Augustine's work in *De Doctrina Christiana* places Christ at the center of all reality, revealing that every created thing is pointing to Him, if we would only open our eyes and see things as they are. We are called to see reality as Christ sees it, and to do that we must read Scripture. For Augustine, Scripture is our model of seeing the world through the divine lens. It will form our perspective and our interpretive abilities so that whatever we encounter will bring us back into the flow of love all creation gives to its Creator. If we remain, silent the rocks will cry out. If we refuse to look, the trees will turn their heads. Scripture is the means to our seeing as we ought, and if it is going to form us, we must learn how to read it. Then as we learn how to read, are formed in the image of the Divine Word, the source of the Scriptures, so that we can read the world as He reads it.

For all that is woven is not just thread. It is a sign. Bread is not *just* bread. Wine is not just wine. A tree is not just a tree. A rock is not just a rock. Emptiness is not just emptiness. These are signs. These individual examples and the whole created order are not merely what they seem to our untrained and unfocused eyes. They are signs, and if we are willing and able to see them, they will delight our hearts and minds with the wonders of the divine which have laid ever before us. The very novelty of our door posts, the soil of our lawns, and the bread in our sandwiches showing us God, where before they had barely been noticeable, will transform our hearts. We will see more like Christ. We will be more like Christ. We will love more like Christ.

The first chapter will outline Augustine's theory of semiotics. By understanding the nature of signs and things in the Scriptures we are understanding reality for Augustine, for their structure is the same. Additionally, we are introduced to the concept of subject. Subjects are those persons, both human and divine, who interact with signs and things. Those subjects can intend meaning to signs as well as interpret the meaning of signs. The result of working through all these relationships the concept of his "third category" which is "things to be used and enjoyed." This category seems a paradox, but it is vital for understanding Augustine's conception of the Scriptures and reality. The answer to this paradox for Augustine is the Incarnation of Christ.

The Incarnation is the primary topic of the second chapter. It is through the Incarnation of Christ that all things become interpretable signs. Though we are capable of interpretation that does not mean that the meaning of signs is interpretable for us. Christ opens creation to being understood by us. He encompasses in himself the nature of sign, signified and subject, and in so doing redeems all three roles for our use. He makes it possible for us to use himself to enjoy that which ought to be enjoyed, which is also himself. He is signified taken on flesh, that which can be used and enjoyed. We may learn to use and enjoy Christ through the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach us how Christ sees the world, how the structure of reality is constructed. By becoming better interpreters of Scripture we can better understand how Christ uses the signs, and by following his example we can begin to use and enjoy all things as we ought.

The need to use creation for the enjoyment of God is the subject of the third chapter. The third chapter examines the responsibility of humanity upon recognition of this structure. If the new world of signs through Christ is opened to us, we cannot be

excused for returning to old defunct meanings and interpretations. Therefore, having come to recognize these truths we must be trained to act upon this knowledge and become good interpreters of the signs of creation. The path starts by learning to be good interpreters of Scripture. Augustine spends a great deal of time identifying the knowledge, character, and skills of a good interpreter, and his conclusions are outlined. Then finally we turn to the ultimate model, the examples of Christ in the Scriptures. If we can understand how Christ sees the world we know how we must see the world.

The end of interpreting the Scriptures for Augustine is the building of *caritas*, which is really conforming our hearts to the image of Christ. Therefore, the appropriate place to end is to ask ourselves how we can use the signs of this world like Christ did? How can we see as He sees, do as He does and love as He loves?

CHAPTER 1

Establishing Augustine's Semiotic Framework

Signs and Things

Augustine is one of the foundational authors in the discussion of semiotics.

According to John Deely in *The Four Ages of Understanding*, a large survey of the place of "sign" in the history of philosophy,

the idea of sign that is the base conception for semiotics proper was not formulated until late in the 4th century when Saint Augustine put forward a definition of sign (*signum*) that was general enough to be equally applicable in natural and social contexts.¹

Augustine's interest in signs is determined by the nature of signs in relationship to Scripture. *De Doctrina Christiana*, written between c. 396 and 427, contains a lengthy discussion of his theory of semiotics, taking up almost three books of the text.² It is in this treatise that he claims, "all doctrine concerns either signs or things."³

The division of doctrine into signs and things is the beginning of a basic framework for understanding Augustine's theory of semiotics. There are things which represent other things: signs. There are things which can be considered only in themselves. There are things which are to be enjoyed: God. There are things which are to

¹ John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 215.

² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson Jr., (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), ix. (From now on OCD).

³ OCD I.II.2

be used: everything else. There are also things which are to be used and enjoyed. The three pieces of understanding signs for Augustine are the sign, the signified, and the interpreter. The last thing which should be noted is that this framework will always come back to Scripture for Augustine. He is writing a treatise on semiotics in order that others might come to understand Scripture better, which will help them understand and thus enjoy God better.

*Three Categories of Things*⁴

When considering the term “things” there are three categories for Augustine: thing to be enjoyed, things to be used, and things to be enjoyed and used.⁵ Each of these kinds of things is defined by an action taken toward them by us, and therefore the action of enjoying and using must be understood in addition to the category itself. The addition of subjects as part of the nature of things is not explicit in Augustine. But Rowan Williams in his article “Language, Reality, and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*” reveals the place of subject in Augustine’s picture of reality by addressing the relationships between sign and use, as well as thing and enjoyment. Williams identifies what he calls “a step toward a more general theory of language” for Augustine.⁶

⁴ The word Augustine uses for thing in the Latin is *res*. According to the Liddell and Short *res* is “a thing object being: matter, affair, event, fact, circumstance, occurrence, deed, condition, case, etc.; and sometimes merely = something” when used in a general sense and “an actual thing, the thing itself, reality, truth, fact” when used in a particular sense.
(<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dres>)

⁵ OCD I.II.3-I.III.3

That step is understanding how humans interact with the world of things. Williams focuses in on Augustine's terms *use/uti* and *enjoy/frui*. "Human beings," Williams says, "do not live an only a cognitive life," but rather find themselves "engaged with the world" which "operates in one of two ways upon our willing and loving."⁷ The ways are to be ends or means, to be enjoyed or to be used, to "[give] us a satisfaction entire in itself" or "intending more than itself."⁸

The Triadic Nature of Signs

Williams identifies the fact that the vocabulary Augustine chooses, particularly the words use and enjoyment, implies that there are subjects doing the using and enjoying. Despite the fact Augustine never explicitly identifies subjects as part of the framework Williams says that

Augustine assumes that 'signifying' is a threefold, not a twofold, affair, involving the subject for whom signs signify. We cannot miss the point that discussion of signification is also discussion of those beings who are involved in meaning or 'intending' or understanding. The distinction between *frui* and *uti* is thus; it is the means whereby Augustine links what he has to say about language with what he has to say about beings who 'mean'...⁹

Susannah Ticciati, in her article "The Human Being as Sign in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," extends the identification Williams makes. She says that

⁶ Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1989): 139. Accessed April 3, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924766>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Causal relations are dyadic, involving brute physical interaction. Sign relations, over and above any causal relations they may entail, involve a relation of ‘standing for’, or representation: the sign signifies something for a third.¹⁰

Both of these authors are drawing out the structure Augustine is building upon, making it explicit. Williams clearly identifies that a subject is necessary in the kind of representative relationship Augustine is talking about. Ticciati reemphasizes this point by contrasting the representative nature of semiotic relationships with causal relationships. Dyadic causal relationships do not require any other things. All that is needed is cause and effects. Representation on the other hand necessitates something to be represented to. Signs are pointless unless there is a subject to mean and/or interpret them. Without this third part, things are reduced to causality, and there is nothing to know or understand but what is to be seen in cause and effect.

Additionally, Williams claims that for a thing to be *signum* is for it to be used and not enjoyed for itself and that which is to be treated only as *res*, as thing, and not *signum* must be that which can only be enjoyed.¹¹ He is connecting the two relationships on the basis of there being a subject doing the using and enjoying of the *res* and *signum*. The triadic nature allows for the possibility of this ‘superimposition’ because a subject must interpret things that are meant. As Ticciati explains, dyadic relations are simple, they do not require interpretation from a subject. In that kind of framework nothing can be used, everything simply is what it is. In a triadic structure, however, all things have a context

¹⁰ Susannah Ticciati, “The Human Being as Sign in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 55, no. 1 (2013), 24

¹¹ Williams 140

which affects their meaning to the subject which perceives them, because they do not merely exist, but exist ‘representatively’, semiotically to the subject. This means that all things are, or at least can be, used or enjoyed by subjects.

Walker Percy expands on the triadic relationship by claiming that for the symbolic relationship to even exist there must be two subjects. The triadic relationship between a sign, signified and subject, is mirrored with the subject that is giving or receiving that sign. He calls this a “tetradic structure.”¹² Percy’s description is a helpful picture but does not quite align with Augustine’s understanding. It is perhaps more accurate to consider the relationship Augustine is parsing out as two triadic relations. The primary distinction between Augustine’s view and Walker’s is that the relationship between the divine and human subject is not mirrored like in Walker’s picture.¹³ Human

¹² Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man is, How Queer Language Is, and What has one to do with the other?*, Firar Strauss and Giraux, New York (1984). 200-201

use of signs can only ever be considered as analogous to God's use of such signs. We are not working on the same plane. In fact, for Walker's picture to reconcile to Augustine's, a third dimension, a vertical dimension is necessary, placing the divine subject over and above all human ones.

The implications of such a shift are various, but perhaps one of the most helpful is that the superior nature of the divine reinforces the idea that there is a right and wrong way for the signs of the divine to be interpreted, to be used, and to be enjoyed (or not enjoyed as the case may be). For Augustine there are things which should and should not be enjoyed, and there are things which should and should not be used. That does not mean that people will not enjoy things which ought to have been used, or attempt to use things which ought to have been enjoyed. Yet, Augustine's framework is such that it is

¹³ Percy 200;

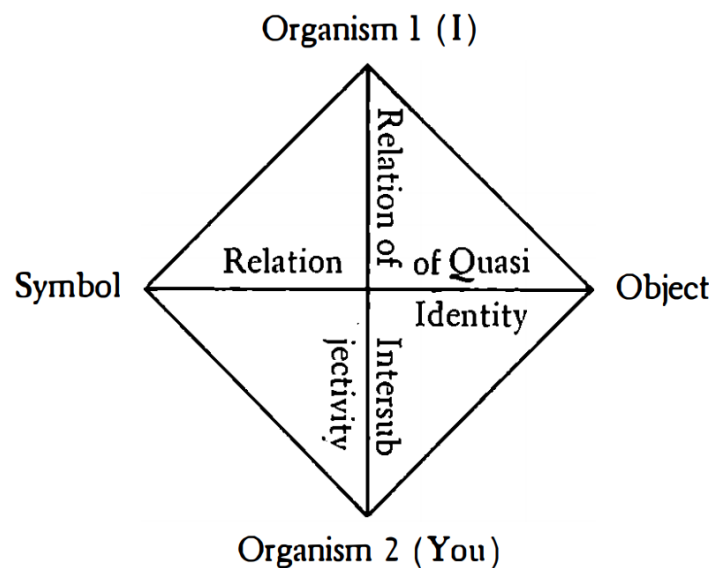


Figure 6. Symbol Tetrad: Generic Type of Symbolic Behavior

focused first and foremost on how things ought to be, and how we as humans ought to interact with both the Scriptures and all reality.

Things to be Enjoyed

The first category, things to be enjoyed, are things which “make us blessed.”¹⁴ These are things which are worthy to be “love[d] for [their] own sake.”¹⁵ That is what it means to enjoy something, to love it for no other reason than its own worthiness to be enjoyed. What is enjoyed is an end to itself.

There is only one thing for Augustine which should be enjoyed, being worthy to be loved for itself: The Trinity.¹⁶ The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are above all things, immutable, and eternal. Therefore, the divine nature is forever and unchangeably in the supreme position. This means God cannot be used to get to something else, because there is nothing else to get to. God can never be a means to an end. Therefore, God is that which is to be enjoyed, and all other things “are to be used so that we may be able to enjoy those” things which are immutable and eternal.¹⁷

Though a thing is meant to be enjoyed, however, does not mean that it will be enjoyed. Nor does it mean that things which ought not to be enjoyed for their own sake will not be. Augustine is speaking in terms of how things *ought* to be, though he

¹⁴ OCD I.III.3

¹⁵ OCD. I.IV.4

¹⁶ OCD I.V.5

¹⁷ OCD I.XXII.20

obviously recognizes that this is often not the case. Williams addresses this wrongly oriented enjoyment by saying “the language of *uti* [use] is designed to warn against an attitude towards any finite person or object that terminates their meaning in their capacity to satisfy my desire, which treats them as the end of desire, conceiving my meaning in terms of them and theirs in terms of me.”¹⁸ When a thing meant to be used is enjoyed as an end, it is defined in terms of that enjoyment. No longer is it opened up toward anything other than itself. No longer is it being used *for*, but rather it is turned in on itself. Its meaning is terminated in itself and its user, and its potential enjoyment will inevitably be exhausted.¹⁹

Things to be Used

Things to be used are essentially the means to the end of that which ought to be enjoyed. Augustine claims that “those things which are to be used help and, as it were, sustain us as we move toward blessedness in order that we may gain and cling to those things which make us blessed” i.e. things to be enjoyed.²⁰ To use something is not to enjoy it for itself, but for the sake of something else which is to be enjoyed. Augustine compares things to be used to vehicles. These vehicles carry us to our goal, and ought not to be loved for themselves or they will cause us to make the journey less effectively and

¹⁸ Williams, 140.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ OCD I.IV.4

more slowly. Such misdirected enjoyment will cause us to delay the blessedness which is the true end of our lives.²¹

Augustine claims all things as vehicles which are not the goal itself, i.e. the Trinity, and such a description should not be considered hyperbole. His claim on ‘all’ other things is literal. He intentionally reveals that even other humans fall into the category of use.²² His reasoning is that if we are to love God with all our heart, mind and strength there should be no love left over for anything else in and of itself. Therefore, “whatever else appeals to the mind as being lovable should be directed into that channel into which the whole current of love flows,” which is toward God.²³ Such a drastic statement does not necessarily mean that human beings cannot be loved or enjoyed, but that since our “greatest reward is that we enjoy Him... all of us who enjoy him may enjoy one another in Him.”²⁴ Augustine is also very careful to remind us that “enjoyment is very like use with delight.”²⁵ One can be delighted by and take delight in what is being used, so long as it does not become a love of the thing itself rather than in reference to the love of God for God’s self. When an object of our delight loses that frame of reference, it becomes like the love of the vehicle for its own sake, which causes our journey to blessedness to be hindered.

²¹ Ibid.

²² OCD I.XXII.20

²³ OCD I.XXII.21

²⁴ OCD I.XXXII.35

²⁵ OCD I.XXXIII.37

When Augustine discusses things in themselves, he means those things which are “not used to signify something else.”²⁶ They are what they are and can be considered in themselves. In contrast, signs are that which point one toward something else other than themselves. Augustine gives the example that “wood, stone, cattle, and so on” are things which do not mean anything else, they simply are what they are. But “that wood concerning which we read that Moses cast it into bitter waters that their bitterness might be dispelled... that stone which Jacob places at his head...that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son,” for Augustine, are not only things, but signs.²⁷ In light of the context, and the proper interpretation from a capable interpreter, these instances of wood stone and beast are things which point to other things or ideas and should not be considered only in and of themselves, but are rather, as he puts it, “things used to signify something.”²⁸ Thus, all signs must first be things. For Augustine, though all signs must be things, not all things are signs. For if there is nothing, it can signify nothing in his logic. In practice, this situation is much like a rectangle and a square. Every square is a rectangle, but not every rectangle is a square. So too is every sign a thing but not every thing a sign.

It is important to note that when referencing a ‘thing’ which does not signify something else, Augustine is not making the claim that it *cannot* signify something else. Just as in his example though wood, stone, cattle and so forth do not necessarily signify

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

anything they can be used to signify something as they are in his scriptural references. All things then, signs included, may be considered by themselves as things which can be understood in themselves, but may also be used as signs which point to something else. Something can be a sign and also be left unused. Just because a sign is understood only as a thing in itself that does not negate its nature as a sign. It is merely an unused sign.

Signs as Things to be Used

Signs fall under the category of *use*. Whereas things to be enjoyed are considered for their own sakes, signs are considered “for their value as signs which signify something else.”²⁹ Augustine brings a more nuanced version of this definition of signs out in the first section of Book II, describing a sign as “a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the sense.”³⁰ Despite Augustine’s relatively simple picture in comparison to his contemporaries, Rowan Williams points out that Augustine “insists that a doctrine of signs is a first step toward a more general theory of language.”³¹ A more general theory of language will allow Augustine to make the leap toward discussing the nature of signs and how they relate to subjects.

Part of the first step toward this theory is identifying the distinction between two kinds of signs: natural and conventional. Natural signs are those sorts of signs which signify but are not intentionally produced by subjects. Smoke does not intend to signify

²⁹ OCD II.I.1

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Williams, 139.

the existence of a fire, nor an animal intend its tracks to lead us to it.³² Natural signs lack an intentional signification and only have meaning to the subject because the subject appropriates a signification.

In contrast, the conventional sign is a sign which is intentionally created and ‘meant’ by subjects. Augustine claims that,

Conventional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood. Nor is there any reason for signifying, or for giving signs, except for bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action of the mind in the person who makes the sign³³

This passage substantiates his earlier claim that “things are learned by signs,” by explaining the way signs teach subjects, and for what purpose subjects create signs.³⁴ The transfer of spiritual motion from one mind to another by the making of a sign, is how things can come to be known. That which is unknown is transferred in terms of that which is known. A known sign is known because it is conventional, it is commonplace, recognized as something which means something else. In the case of natural signs, they are not communicating directly from subject to subject, from mind to mind, because the producer or maker of the sign is not a subject intending to transmit anything to the interpreter of that sign. The bond of convention is not between them. The track is not meant, the smoke is not meant, and therefore there is no way a mind can have the “action of the mind” transferred to itself, because there was no intended action by a subject. The

³² OCD II.I.1

³³ OCD II.II.3

³⁴ OCD I.II.2

difference between a subject's intent and the possibility of an unintended action to be sign is the line of division between natural and conventional signs.³⁵

A conventional sign must be more than meant. There must be a commonality between the interpreter of the sign and the maker of the sign. In order to learn via words (signs) one has to comprehend the common agreed upon meaning of those words. Those same words are capable of taking on a great variety of connotations and become intertwined with personal and collective experience, but there must be a basis which all have in common before it can be properly communicated. Birds have calls, humans have words, and God has given us the Scriptures. All of these are conventional. They are created, and they are meant, and they are capable of being understood or interpreted, if not in their entirety in the way that is common between the interpreter and the intender.

Sign as Gift

The word Augustine uses, which is translated as conventional is *data*. This word is a participle of *do, dare, dedi, datum*, which in Latin means *to give*.³⁶ Such signs are given things. They come from a giver and they have a recipient. There is an intention and

³⁵ It is possible that something can be interpreted from a sign that was entirely unintended. Such a situation is the result of the ability of subjects to interpret. Yet there are fitting and unfitting ways to interpret signs, and Augustine's explanation of the right ways to interpret signs in such situations is identified in chapter three of this thesis.

³⁶ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *do*, Perseus Tufts, Oxford, 1879, 8 March 2021, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Ddo1>

purpose. Gifts are not given for no reason but have a motivation, for gifts are from subjects to subjects.

Though at first a gift seems one dimensional, wrapped in its packaging, with your name scrawled on the paper or perhaps on a tag or sticker, it has the potential to take on entirely new meaning. Placed in its context, unwrapped, the recipient unveiled, suddenly there is a vast amount of ways in which this gift could be meant, and an equal number of ways in which it can be interpreted. The nature of signs as gift in Augustine's view does not disqualify the potential for multiple meanings of a sign but rather affirms and intensifies the fact. Augustine clearly believes that there are both literal and figurative meanings of signs, obvious and obscure meanings, and we must work to find out those meanings.³⁷ Therefore, understanding sign as gift does not eliminate the creativity and imagination of the interpreter, but rather demands it.

The proper interpretation of signs reveals layers and nuance, a multiplicity of meaning which must be discerned at different levels of depth. It is clear then that in order for a sign to be conventional, it must be mutually understood as part of a standard syntax or vocabulary. Yet even within a standard syntax or vocabulary things like context, tone, timing, and personal experience will affect the interpretation of such a sign.

To reference a personal example, I have a card from three years ago which was given to me by a female friend. It was intended as a genuine expression of friendship from her to me. Over time I could read that card and understand that meaning but it also began to remind me of the warmth of her heart, the quickness of her wit, her imaginative

³⁷ OCD II.IX.14

creativity and how much she meant to me. Now when I look at it, I am reminded of the sparks which led me to marry the love of my life.

For Augustine, the card was a sign with a meaning intended by the subject who is the giver to a subject who is the receiver. The card was supposed to convey a certain meaning using the various conventions familiar to both subjects, like words, colors, the context of the holiday, etc. It is reasonable, however, that the card, as context develops, becomes a sign pointing to different things, like love and the nature of the subject which it came from. As I spend time with the sign and understand it better, interpret it more fully, I begin to understand more fully that which it points to. It is not wrong that I only understood it in one way at first, but neither is it wrong that I should understand in more ways as time goes on. In fact, it is natural that such deeper understanding should happen. So it is with the Scriptures. Better understanding of the Scripture leads to better understanding of the one who gave the Scriptures.

For example, in Isaiah 7, a virgin birth is predicted, which is often considered fulfilled in Isaiah 8 through the birth of *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*. In light of their current context scriptural interpreters understood the prophecy to be fulfilled. In the course of time, however, as context develops, people like the apostles and church fathers, including Augustine himself, recognize it as a sign pointing to the birth of Christ.³⁸ As new context arises for subjects who are interpreting signs, those meanings may appear to change and

³⁸ Matthew 1; Matthew 2; John Chrysostom “Against the Anomoeans 5.15”; Augustine “Harmony of the Gospels 1.26,” “City of God 18.46,” “Sermon 370.3”; Jerome “Against Jovinianus 1.32

grow more complex. In the case of human signs, it is reasonable that such signs would take on new meanings as they coexist with their interpreters.

The difference between a human gift or sign and a divine gift or sign is that the meaning which comes to be understood may have been there the whole time in a divine sign. Whereas a human sign may come to take on that meaning because of its place in time or its context, God's meaning for signs is outside of time. Though they may take on meaning for us it is not true that they take on any new meanings from God's point of view. Therefore, God's intention is infinitely discoverable to us, and allows for a multiplicity of meanings to be interpreted by us. The question then becomes, how do humans come to discover and interpret the signs and meanings of God?

CHAPTER 2

The Incarnation, Use, and Enjoyment

This chapter will analyze the relationship between use and enjoyment in the context of Augustine's third category, things to be used and enjoyed. Though Augustine does not offer explanation of what belongs in this category in the same way as the other two categories, this chapter will demonstrate that it is possible and consistent with Augustine's thought, to claim the Incarnation of Christ as the perfect satisfaction of the paradox of the third category. Then the relationship between Christ and Scripture can be examined by attending closely to the structure of Augustine's argument, which reflects a Christocentric understanding of Scripture and reality.

The potential paradox of the third category is the difficulty in reconciling the natures of something which can be used and something which can be enjoyed into the same category. The Godhead is that which can be enjoyed. All else is that which can be used. The third category, then, seems to be say that there must be something which is both divine and created in nature. Given the triadic relationship of signs, it is also conceivable that the third category would also include, sign, signified, and subject, just as the other two categories do. The third category is thus not satisfied by an "it" but only by a "who." That "who" must have a divine and created nature, they must be usable and enjoyable. The only person who fits that criteria is Christ.

The Chalcedonian Creed only thirty years after Augustine finished *De Doctrina Christiana*, states in no uncertain terms that

Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body;

consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; "like us in all things but sin". He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.⁹¹ We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis.³⁹

The third category for Augustine must be useable and enjoyable. Therefore, the third category must somehow be both divine and created. If the third category is that which is to be used and enjoyed it must somehow partake in those two unique and disparate natures. Christ, as the only perfect union of the created and the divine natures, is therefore the most likely fulfillment of the third category. Christ's qualifications are made clear by the words of the creed in three ways: His dual nature, His personhood, and the permanence of His nature.

Two Natures

One cannot enjoy that which is to be used. This is true except in the particular sense, where it is enjoyed within the flow of enjoyment derived from God. One cannot use that which is to be enjoyed for itself, because use is for the purpose of enjoyment. Therefore, God, who is the ultimate source of enjoyment, cannot be used to enjoy any other thing. To imagine the Trinity as something usable would imply that the other thing is more worthy to be enjoyed than the Trinity, which is impossible. Thus, the third category must at once be what ought to be enjoyed, and also be the way to enjoy it. It

³⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II.* (2000), 122.

must have a divine and created nature. This is Christ. The unity of divinity and humanity, uncreated and created, unified together but neither abolished.

Christ, then, is usable insofar as He is human, and enjoyable insofar as He is divine. Christ calls himself the way the truth and the life.⁴⁰ Christ as the Way is comparable to Augustine's example of using a vehicle to arrive at one's destination.⁴¹ Except, in the case of Christ, by loving the vehicle we love the end itself. We use Christ as the vehicle, as the way, but we also love Him for Himself. A way left unused is a way not taken. A way enjoyed for itself, still brings one to the end goal. A vehicle, under the direction of its driver may not necessarily arrive where it was supposed to go, should the driver lose sight of the end goal. A way, loved for its own sake, will eventually take one to where the way leads, because to enjoy the whole way you must follow it to the end. Christ leads us to himself, to God, by way of himself, God incarnate. In this 'way' we may both use and enjoy Christ.

Subject/Personhood

The third category, if it is to encompass all existence, sign signified and subject, it must also include personhood, those persons which are able to use and enjoy, as well as be, signs. Christ is not merely the union of two natures but the union of two natures which find in Him one personhood. There are both created and divine persons, but there is only one person who has a divine and created nature: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ spans the gap between the divine and human subject, bringing those natures together through the hypostatic union within one person, himself.

⁴⁰ John 14:6 ESV

⁴¹ OCD I.IV.4

Christ's personhood is what makes him not just someone we use and enjoy, but someone we model ourselves after. He is a person who lived a life like us. By living as a man, as a human subject, Christ revealed the way in which all subjects must live. He made himself our way, and he made himself our model of how to use and enjoy the way.

Permanence

Yet Christ's union of the sign with the signified and the subject would be for naught if there were no permanence in the person of Christ. If Jesus Christ did not maintain his humanity, or did not maintain his divinity, it would not be relevant how long or how short His stint of perfection was. The consequences of such a revelation are too numerous to go over, but in this context, it would disallow the possibility for the created subject to understand how to use signs. We would be left in the darkness.

But Christ's nature is permanent, and this is possible for two reasons. First, Augustine is clear about the immutability of God.⁴² When that divine nature is unified with human nature in the person of Christ, the permanence of God is bound to the shifting nature of man. Yet this does not mean that God is now changeable, but rather that the created nature is permanently usable in the person of Christ.

Augustine also discusses the permanence of the body and soul by virtue of bodily resurrection. In reference to humanity he says, "the body will... be changed for the better at the time of resurrection," because "it will be animated by a blessed and perfected soul in the utmost peace."⁴³ For Augustine claims that

⁴² OCD I.XXII.20

⁴³ OCD I.XIX.18

it must be believed: neither the soul nor the human body may suffer complete annihilation, but the impious shall rise again into everlasting punishment and the just into everlasting life.⁴⁴

Christ's human nature then need not perish in light of his divine eternity. Rather his human nature by virtue of His resurrection will continue on with His divine nature, both natures everlasting in their perfection and immutability.

The two natures are joined without confusion, preserved as they came together in one person, and they cannot be undone. Additionally, Christ's divinity makes him permanent and unchanging, while his humanity makes Him usable as sign and reminds us that His human nature need not perish but continues on in light of the resurrection. He is therefore an infinitely usable sign and an infinite example of how subjects ought to interact with all signs so long as there are signs that subject must use and enjoy.

Christ's Relationship to Scripture

If Christ is that which we can use and enjoy, Scripture is the means by which we learn to do so. Scripture is the ultimate sign of Christ. Through it we come to know Him, and then we read it in light of him. When we read the Scriptures as a sign to Christ, we are being trained to interpret all creation as a sign of Christ, of the divine, just as Christ does in the Scriptures. By starting with the most perfect sign, we learn to read all the other signs.⁴⁵ These claims are consistent with the structure of the first book of *De Doctrina Christiana*, specifically via the linear journey Augustine makes through his picture of reality. By starting and ending with Scripture, he begins to identify the nature of reality as consistent with that of Scripture. Then topically, he places the Incarnation at

⁴⁴ OCD I.XXI.19

⁴⁵ Williams 141-142

the pivotal moment when he moves from a conversation about enjoyment to one of use. He centralizes the Incarnation in his argumentative arc and in so doing centers Christ in both Scripture and reality. If then we can learn to read Scripture well, we will learn to read all created signs well, because Scripture is a structural mirror of reality in Augustine's argumentative structure.

Following Augustine's Structure

Augustine makes it clear from the beginning that his work is focused on discovering and teaching the Scriptures.⁴⁶ Everything following has to do with or arguably is necessary for working with and understanding the Scriptures well. The first step after Scripture is an introduction of signs and things.⁴⁷ Augustine is making clear that the nature of Scripture is of the same substance as that of reality, it is composed of signs and things. Signs and things, however, are not alone in this scheme. In fact, the existence of signs in particular is only justified in light of the existence of subjects. These are persons capable of meaning and interpreting. Subjects are also both thing and sign, but they have the additional capability of interacting with other signs and things, which Augustine terms 'use' and 'enjoyment'.⁴⁸ These are the layers of reality for Augustine, sign, signified, and subject.

After introducing the layers, Augustine comes to the most real thing, the thing beyond 'things', the Holy Trinity. It is the Trinity, the end of all things, which all subjects

⁴⁶ OCD Prologue 1; I.I.1

⁴⁷ OCD I.II.2

⁴⁸ OCD. I.III.3

are meant to enjoy. The Trinity is the most real, the most ‘thing’ *res* there is, and all other things are oriented toward it.⁴⁹ The Trinity is the ultimate object of enjoyment, the only object of enjoyment, which all things are directed toward. It would be reasonable to assume that his next step would be to address the created order. But rather than move from the Trinity and enjoyment to signs and use, Augustine first introduces the Incarnation of Christ.

The Incarnation

The introduction of the Incarnation directly after the Trinity and before the discussion of material bodies and “use” of other people, is a clear indication of Augustine’s Christocentric understanding of Scripture. It is also indicative of the possibility of his believing Christ to be the fulfillment of the third category.

Only by virtue of the Incarnation can we reach what Augustine is describing as an unreachable, unknowable God. “Have we said anything worthy of God?” Indeed, we can only speak of God because he allows us to.⁵⁰ Yet God is that which we place above all other things, and we cannot see the real value of immutable truth for we are ourselves mutable. It is this God which man cannot reach. It is this God which is separated from us and our efforts to understand Him.

By moving as he does, Augustine introduces the concept of signs and things, use and enjoyment, but he only truly discusses the nature of things and enjoyment up to this point. The true discussion of signs is to come in the second book, but use, which is inseparably related to signs, is given a detailed treatment in the first book, only after the

⁴⁹ Williams, 142

⁵⁰ OCD I.VI.6

Incarnation. He Moves from Scripture, to the categorization of all reality, to that which is enjoyed, God, to the Incarnation. He does not move straight into a discussion of signs, or of the material things, he chooses to move to the Incarnation.

Augustine makes this move because the same ineffable omnipotent God he describes is the God who joined to the material nature of man. It is this God who is signified in all things, who meant all the created order to be read as reaching towards himself, who decided He would set an example for us. He came to be our doctor, to restore our health, restore the image which is broken in us.⁵¹ He is our cure, yet it is foolishness to us.⁵² We are “freed by the foolishness of God” and “his virtues cure our vices.”⁵³ God does what seems nonsensical, He makes a sign of himself. He brings together that which is not usable with that which is usable, divinity with humanity.

Williams claims that Christ “is God’s speech *because* he is worldly silence; he is what cannot be enjoyed or rested in.”⁵⁴ In fact, Williams centers his focus on the cross, as that which ought to “detach us from self-sufficient satisfaction, from image and expectation.”⁵⁵ The unbridgeable distance between the eternal *res* and all earthly representation opens up through this 'anti-representation' that is the cross.”⁵⁶ Christ takes that which in the world is not enjoyed, is not rested in, and reveals the nature of those

⁵¹ OCD I.XIV.13

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ OCD I.XIV.13

⁵⁴ Williams 144

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid.

things as signs, reveals how they are oriented toward God. He reveals how all the things which the world ignores and turns its back on are for usable for the glory of God.

The All Pervasiveness of Use

The Incarnation is the key to what Williams calls the all-pervasiveness of use. He begins by claiming that the Incarnation is the “one authorized 'sign' which for once we cannot mistake for anything but a sign.”⁵⁷ He compares it to God’s speech in order to connect to Augustine’s argument in Book I. Augustine’s discussion of speech is to demonstrate that there are signs such as words which are meant for nothing but signifying the action of one mind to another.⁵⁸ William’s is drawing on this idea to show how God is communicating his ‘mind’ to us through the ‘speech’ of his incarnate Word. Since words, as shown by Augustine, are only to be used to represent other things, so too is the Word made flesh “entirely and authoritatively marked out as an object of ‘use’.”⁵⁹

Williams then claims that “the coming of the Word in flesh establishes... the nature of fleshly being as word, as sign, the all pervasiveness of ‘use’.”⁶⁰ The Incarnation does not describe how “God comes to a place he was not before”, but is rather an unveiling of the way in which the world not only can, but is meant to open up to the divine.⁶¹ For it is revealed clearly to us that all creation “is uttered and ‘meant’ by God, and therefore has no meaning in itself” because the world has been opened up beyond

⁵⁷ Williams 140-141

⁵⁸ OCD II.I-III

⁵⁹ Williams 141

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

itself.⁶² It makes us realize that “we live in a world of restless fluidities in meaning: all terms and all the objects they name are capable of opening up beyond themselves, coming to speak of a wider context, and so refusing to stay still under our attempts to comprehend or systematize or idolize.”⁶³ There are no ends in this finite world. The option of the infinite has been revealed and made accessible through Christ, and so all things may be used, all things ought to be used.

Augustine makes clear that all things ought to be used as he takes the next step in his argument. From the Trinity, to the Incarnation to humans, Augustine reconstructs his initial outline of reality in new terms. We must enjoy God. We must use all other things, including humans, but we can do that because Christ is incarnate. He discusses how we are supposed to love our bodies. “They hate not their bodies but the corruption and solidity of their bodies,” because they long for something better, they long for resurrection.⁶⁴ We must love our bodies and subordinate them to the spirit, so that “the habit of the flesh should be changed for the better... and that what it loves be subjected to something better.”⁶⁵

The extension of the love of our own bodies is the love of our neighbor. In loving our bodies, we are reminded that as a human person we are body and spirit, and so we practice love on ourselves that we might be able to love others with properly oriented

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ OCD I.XXIV.25

⁶⁵ Ibid.

love.⁶⁶ We love our neighbor in order that we might fulfill the two fold command of charity to pursue “a love of God and a love of neighbor.”⁶⁷

Both of these loves, however, are only possible through the Incarnation of Christ. We cannot understand how to truly love ourselves without the example and ever present power of Christ in our lives. We can love our own bodies because Christ took on flesh. We can love others because he took on flesh out of his love for us. Jesus Christ alone enables us to fulfill the all-important commands to love God and to love our neighbor.

Christ Our Enabler

Christ is our example, He is that which we use to enjoy God both directly and indirectly. We use Christ directly as He allows us as part of our ongoing and loving relationship with Him and through Him the Divine Trinity. We use Christ indirectly in the sense that we use His example as the means to making every part of our own life, all the love that we have to offer useful for the enjoyment of God. Without that example we would not know how. Without the loving relationship, we would not be able to use anything well at all. To become like Christ is to become usable yourself. Christ is the ultimate sign for us of God, and our goal in life is to become like Him, we are trying to become signs of God. Christ enables the human person to become a sign of God. Indeed, we bear the image of God and in that way we point, but the Incarnation of Christ allows the human body, the human person to be a true sign, an unmistakable sign. This is the reason Christ establishes the Church. It is meant to be His body, it is meant to be that which was usable for our sakes. We are His representation on earth now, and so we must

⁶⁶ I.XXVI.27

⁶⁷ Ibid.

be like Him, He must be seen in us, so that we can be the sign of God we ought to be, the sign he has enabled us to be.

Our need for Christ both in relationship and as example brings us back to the question of Christ's relationship to the Scriptures, and to Augustine's last two steps of the journey before he ends Book One. Augustine's final statements concern the love of God, and the power of Scripture to build *caritas* in us. He ends where he begins and reminds us what all this has been about. Scripture is our ever present and unmistakable sign on earth. We know at its center is Christ because

one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time.⁶⁸

This intimate relationship between Christ and the Scriptures is why Augustine ties together his framework of reality and Scripture. We must learn to interpret all things, use all things for the enjoyment of God. Yet in our imperfection, our lack of charity, as Augustine might put it, we fail in this. Our interpretation of all creation needs to be transformed, and it is transformed through the proper interpretation of Scripture, which is itself made possible only through Christ. A Christological interpretation which builds up the love of God and neighbor, is the parameters of any proper interpretation of the Scriptures for Augustine.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Exposition on Ps. 103*, trans. J.E. Tweed. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 8. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801103.htm>>.

Scripture is the penultimate sign after Jesus Christ. It is the sign which is always able to be present to us and by the grace of the Holy Spirit becomes a vehicle of the presence of Christ who is the ultimate sign.⁶⁹ Scripture is, as Christ is, truth made material. Just as the life of Christ reminds us that we are not meant to stop and enjoy the world at the expense of our journey toward God, so too does Scripture remind us that there is no point at which we have apprehended all that we need. Augustine explains how Scripture keeps us on this journey through obscurity and ambiguity.⁷⁰ He believes that what comes easily to us is not valued, but moreover, he thinks that such ambiguity keeps us humble. In the *Confessions* Augustine describes how one must stoop through a low door to see the grand arching ceiling of the beautiful room inside as an analogy for the humility required to receive the beauty and glory of Scripture.⁷¹

Williams reminds us that “humility is the indispensable soil for caritas to grow on,” and so recognizing the immensity of Scriptural meaning ought to keep us humble, and thus coming back for more, walking ever farther into the room.⁷² We must remain “restless” as Williams says, preventing our lives from falling prey to the “constant danger of premature closure, the supposition that the end of desire has been reached and the ambiguities of history and language put behind.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Williams 141

⁷⁰ OCD II.VI.7

⁷¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991) 40.

⁷² Williams 143

⁷³ Williams 142

Because Scripture, as the ultimate sign of Christ, is the ultimate way we learn of Christ (since we learn through signs), Scripture is also our means of building our understanding of reality. This is because in Augustine's view, as has been demonstrated, Scripture and reality have the same composition, likely due to the fact that they have the same author. Scripture is composed of signs and things. Reality is composed of signs and things. At the center of Scripture is Christ. At the center of all reality is Christ. Both Scripture and reality must be read by its subjects, to be used for the enjoyment of God. To know Scripture then is to begin to know and understand all created signs. Christ is the ultimate and permanent sign which we may use to enjoy God, but Scripture is the penultimate sign, the sign by which we learn to use all of reality.

CHAPTER 3

Learning to Interpret

The purpose of this last chapter is twofold. First it works to establish that the knowledge of signs places demands on us as subjects which ought to be met to the best of our abilities, and that ignorance or apathy is not an acceptable option. Second, it will examine practical methods of acting on those obligations based on Augustine's examples of *caritas* and his requirements for a competent interpreter of Scripture, as well as considering Christ as the model interpreter for our own action.

The Responsibility of Recognition

The consequences of a reality composed entirely of signs opened by Christ are vast, and this section will examine the implications most closely related to Augustine's framework. First, the nature of signs demands that they must be used in order to properly orient oneself toward that which they point. If a sign points to another sign, then one must learn to use that sign in addition to the first sign. If it points to God then one must learn to use it in order to enjoy God, for that is its purpose. As discussed in the first chapter, to attempt to enjoy a sign for itself is a confusion of *uti* and *frui*. It is a thing meant to point to something else, to enjoy it for itself is to divorce it from its nature. The demands of a Christocentric reality are that each and every part of it be used as a way to enjoy God. We are not bound to this demand, however, until there is recognition of the world's semiotic nature.

Rowan Williams describes how the Jewish religious customs and Jewish interpretations of Scriptures fell into the trap of staying in the same structure of

interpretation despite revelation to the contrary.⁷⁴ Though the Jewish semiotic understanding was perfectly acceptable for a great period of time, upon the arrival of Christ those customs and traditions were revealed to be a sign toward Him, rather pointing toward the Messiah as most Jews understood him.

A sign may be usefully observed in ignorance; but when it is shown to be a sign, a choice is introduced. To observe a symbolic form or deliberately go on inhabiting a symbolic structure of words and images in the old way, when the definitive sign appears that draws together all law, all rites, all images, is to turn the old order of signs into something different, to begin to 'enjoy' it, to choose it for itself, and so to refuse the summons to time and history and the possibility of Caritas which the sign is meant to carry.⁷⁵

When the true orientation of signs pointing to Christ is revealed it is no longer acceptable to continue on in the old way of thinking about them. This is true for the Jews, but it is true for all people, in all things.

Christians cannot simply use the Scriptures as the 'best' sign at the expense of all others, because the Bible by its nature reveals the semiotic nature of all reality. If we understand that all things point to God, we are bound to using them for that end. It is true we are able to intellectually understand this is true without doing anything about it. Yet this does not make us any less bound to doing so. We can flagrantly dismiss our obligations yet the responsibility which they place upon us and the consequences of our failure will still be very real. To do otherwise than to use all creation, all signs, is to not believe that the various ways God uses creation to reveal himself to us is of little or no value to us. It is to choose our way of looking at the thing rather than God's way of looking at the thing. This becomes particularly poignant when we consider what the Incarnation reveals about us as human beings.

⁷⁴ Williams 146

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Human Beings as Sign and Subject

The Incarnation reveals to us the semiotic nature of the created order, of which we are apart. The Incarnation did not make all things sign, but showed us that they are sign. It enables us to read all reality as sign. Yet it also reveals the semiotic nature of us, as part of that order. Christ not only enables the interpretation of all nature as sign, all objects as sign, but all subjects as sign. As creatures we human beings are sign, with all its consequences. Yet we are more than object, we are subject. This greatly enhances our responsibility to use all created signs well in two ways. The first is that we upon recognizing that humans are signs, we have a responsibility to learn to “use” other humans in Augustine’s technical sense, and also love them. Secondly, we must recognize that both as sign and subject we ourselves must be imitators of Christ. Therefore, we must both be clear and obvious signs pointing others toward Him, as well as being good interpreting models for others.

Using Humans for Enjoyment of God

Using human beings is an extremely problematic phrase. Immanuel Kant for instance claims in what is referred to as “the Formula for Humanity” that “you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.”⁷⁶ This is not, however, a problem that Augustine is unaware of. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Augustine believes it is possible to use human beings while loving them.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Königlichen Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (1900-)*, ed. *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, Georg Reimer (later Walter De Gruyter), 429.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.XXII.21

Augustine does not believe that people should be treated as ends unto themselves. They cannot be enjoyed. He believes that to treat a sign as an end unto itself is highly destructive for a number of reasons. Augustine illustrates this through his example of a vehicle taking you to the place you are supposed to go.⁷⁸ If you come to enjoy the vehicle, which for Augustine means to love it for its own sake, then you are misappropriating its purpose. You may begin to think that the vehicle is better than the place you are going, and prefer to wander around enjoying the vehicle rather than arrive at the destination which holds your true and ultimate happiness. Such a use of the vehicle is not only a deception, but an abuse of the vehicle. The vehicle should not give you purpose, or be your motivation for your loving using and enjoying. The vehicle's purpose was to take you to that destination, which is a high and worthy purpose, but to use it for itself, is to strip it of its purpose and force it to serve your own purpose.

Augustine does, however, believe that humans may be both used and loved, if not enjoyed. There are three options for understanding this concept. The first is based on God's relationship to humanity. Augustine believes that people may be loved and used by other people because he believes God's relationship to humans is one of loving use, and so we too in imitation of the divine may do so with each other in pursuit of enjoying God. Augustine, always recognizing that God's ways are higher than our ways, reminds us that "He does not use a thing as we do."⁷⁹ God does not need to use human beings to accomplish his glory and purposes but rather "that use he is said to make of us is made

⁷⁸ OCD I.IV.4

⁷⁹ OCD I.XXXII.35

not to his utility but ours, and insofar as he is concerned refers only to his goodness.”⁸⁰ If we aspire to imitate God’s actions in the world we too may strive to use others only in reference to their own good and the glory of God.

Additionally, in the model of loving use, Augustine differentiates between love and enjoyment. Enjoyment is loving for the thing’s own sake, but we can love things for the sake of God. For when “you enjoy a man in God, it is God rather than the man you enjoy,” but “enjoyment is very much like use with delight.”⁸¹ So we may enjoy our fellow humans, as long as that enjoyment is being properly referred to God. Human beings are not our end, so we cannot enjoy them in that way. Yet, to use them, does not mean that we are not loving them or not doing what is for their own good.

The second option is that the Incarnation of Christ has revealed that human being may participate in the third category, that which can be used and enjoyed, through their participation in the body of Christ. Through Christ we may be able to be used and enjoyed by others, not necessarily in the body of Christ. We may be used insofar as people may use us to enjoy Christ to see him more clearly through our lives, but enjoy us insofar as we are a part of the body of Christ, which means that to enjoy us is to enjoy Him and vice versa.

The third option is that Christ, in revealing the perfected image of God in humanity opens up the image of God in all people to be both used and enjoyed for those capable of knowing it. There are other options which could be delved into, but they are

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ OCD I.XXXII.35

highly speculative and steps away from the part of Augustine's work this paper primarily deals with.

Whichever option may indeed be the case, they all point to the same thing: our responsibility as interpreters. Susannah Ticciati makes this point:

More specifically, what needs transforming is not the creature to be used or enjoyed, but the creature doing the using and enjoying, not the sign, but the user of the sign. Human beings must learn, not to become better signs of God, but to become better interpreters of their fellow creatures as signs of God - better users, better lovers.⁸²

Signs need not change. Subjects need to change. We need to change. Created subjects must seek to become like the divine subjects which we image. Our failure as interpreters will often obscure the image of God in us, but more importantly it is an abuse of our fellow creatures.

In *The Father of Lights*, Junius Johnson points out three consequences of improper use of other creatures as signs.

If we deny the already existing sign character of creatures, we objectify them. If we deny the objective character of creatures as existing apart from and before our uses of them, reducing them to mere signs, we spiritualize them. If we use the creatures in ways that are incompatible with the way it images God, we profane it by trying to make it say of God something it is fundamentally opposed to saying.

This is an attempt to enlist the creature in our own blasphemy.⁸³

⁸² Ticciati 28

⁸³ Junius Johnson, "The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty," (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2020) 134.

The consequences Johnson describes ought to reveal to us the stakes of being competent semiotic interpreters, it ought to push us to become better interpreters. Yet, the struggle to use that which we know is usable, to be the kind of interpreter Christ is, is the great difficulty which a semiotic, Christo-centric reality presents to us. Upon truly understanding the fact that reality is so composed, that choice is ever present before our physical and spiritual eyes.

Humans as Redeemed Signs and Subjects

We must be careful to use all things in a loving way, but in this scheme, we must also recognize that we are being used. Contrary to what Ticciati claims we cannot disallow ourselves to become better signs of God, for we are imperfect signs of God.⁸⁴ She is referring to the idea that humans need to focus less on themselves, to become better lovers, to place ourselves more clearly in relationship to God and the world. She is absolutely right, but it does not dismiss our responsibility to be to this world the kind of sign Christ asks us to be, which is to be like himself. We must seek to conform more exactly to the sign Christ is because we are shattered images, imperfect reflections of Christ in us. If we are to imitate the person of Christ, if we are to conform to his image, we must prepare ourselves to be used as signs, because He is a perfect sign.

Yet our role as subjects can make this complicated. A rock cannot obscure its own meaning, neither can a piece of wood nor a beast. These things mean and must merely be interpreted. Yet we are not just things, but subjects.

As subjects we can obscure or clarify our semiotic natures. In one way as humans, we image God, as followers of Christ we are signs to God in yet another respect. Yet,

⁸⁴ Ticciati 28

because we are subjects who can make choices, our actions, our lives, and our decision all affect the clarity of our place as sign. Though we are by nature oriented toward God, meant for his glory, we may greatly obscure that sign, damage it almost beyond recognition even, because we have the power to change, in a way a tree, a cloud, or a horse does not. The hope of the Incarnation is that image can be repaired through the work of the person of Jesus Christ, our changeability can become change for the better.

Becoming a clearer sign has everything to do with being the kind of interpreter we ought to be. Making the choices to see the world as Christ does daily. If we cannot interpret all things, we cannot clearly point to God, for that is what all created things are pointing to. Our interpretation determines our actions, how we treat all things, how we treat, think about, and love other people. If we do not understand the way a thing points to God, we do not truly understand the things and cannot use it as we ought. It is vital that we become better interpreters so that we might be better signs. Our choices can absolutely obscure our place in the world as signs. The follies and failure of the historical church should be proof enough of that. We damage our own semiotic nature, our own usable nature when we make choices and commit sins which fracture the way we should be imaging God. Our images are imperfect, and are we not all trying to be more like Christ? Are we not trying to conform to his image? If so, then we are clearly trying to become more clear and true signs, since Christ is sign. We are trying to become better more perfect subjects, because Christ is subject. We are trying to be in communion with him to which all things point: Christ as signified.

Our Use of Signs

Living in this semiotic world demands a strict paradigm: to use all things to enjoy God, or not. The choice must be made. It is a stark reality, but it is where we must start, for if we cannot recognize the semiotic value of all created things, then there is no possible way to differentiate what should and should not be used. Only upon making this one decision, upon recognizing the reality of the world as pointing toward God, may we be opened to the infinite variety and multifaceted beauty of all signs.

Making the choice to believe in the semiotic nature of creation is only the first step. Just because we believe something can be used to enjoy God does not mean we are personally capable of enjoying God through it. We might be unable to use some signs because they are sinful or unrighteous, so we must avoid them. Though, if, on the other hand, we are unable to use them due to a weakness in ourselves, we have two options. We can either work to see those signs well and use them as we ought through grace, practice, and spiritual discipline, or we must give up on them. It is conceivable then that some people will be capable of using some signs the way they ought to be used, for the glory of God, while other people are incapable of using those same signs.

One of the most vital skills we can learn under this paradigm is discerning when we are personally unable to use something which might be used for the glory of God. We trick ourselves into thinking that merely because something *can* be used for the enjoyment of God that we *are* using it for the glory of God. This is a dangerous self-deception. A Christian who greatly enjoys wine can learn to enjoy God through the complexity and history of the flavors, the experiences at which the wine is present which

become meaningful memories, the fellowship of friends and potentially easy comradeship of strangers with a similar interest. An alcoholic is capable of none of this.

An example closer to Augustine's experience is his dear friend Alypius' relationship to the gladiatorial arena. Perhaps there is a way in which going to the arena could be used to enjoy God, but not by Alypius, who "was seized by an incredible obsession for gladiatorial spectacles" even though he "held such spectacles in aversion and detestation."⁸⁵ Though even more importantly (and more plausibly than using the games to enjoy God) he is dragged there by his supposed 'friends.' Perhaps someone else could befriend people who frequented the arena, but not Alypius. "He presumed on himself when he ought to have relied on [God]," and perhaps if he had had discernment in choosing his friends, in the signs he surrounds himself with, he might not have "drank in savagery" and "imbibed madness."⁸⁶

The problem is the differences between what we are capable and incapable of using are not always, and in fact are rarely, so stark as in the case of an alcoholic or Alypius' obsessions. The danger lies in those things which are most subtle, for this makes them the most insidious. Augustine's own life often walks a fine line of his inability to personally use something which others, or even he himself later could use to enjoy God. One of his first such experiences is at the theatre in Carthage. At the time he was "captivated by theatrical shows," because they were "representations of [his] own miseries and fueled [his] fire."⁸⁷ Augustine is disgusted by how theatrical productions

⁸⁵ Confessions VI.VIII.13

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Confessions III.II.2

produce in him false sympathy, false mercy, and general self-indulgence. Yet of course it seems entirely conceivable (particularly in modern circumstances) that the theatrical arts can be a beautiful expression of love for God that is easily enjoyed by those who can interpret as sign. But for Augustine, it was a temptation.

To further illustrate the issue of personal ability to interpret various signs, consider a climbing wall. On a climbing wall there is a great variety of paths to take. Some are easier some are harder, some zig zag and some are straight up. Yet they all end up at the top. Within this great variety of paths there is an even wider variety of holds, the protrusions on the rock which one uses hands and feet to grip and propel oneself off of. Some grips are well textured and shaped to fit your hands or your feet. They are easy to use and simple to follow. Other grips are extremely smooth, rounded, even. They feel nice to the touch but it is very easy to slip off of them, unless you have very well developed grip strength. The same is true of holds that are very narrow, sometimes requiring the use of only two fingers or the very tips of your toes. Your grip must be very well developed to use such a hold. Other grips are extremely rough to the touch. They will often be bigger, and seem very promising, but should you make a wrong move and slip off, they will tear up your fingers and palms.

The signs of all creation are like these grips. When translated to a real rock face and not merely an indoor rock wall one may not even be able to see a path to the top. These great difficulties are why we must turn to Christ and the Scriptures. When we look at life and creation, we may not necessarily see the paths to God there. But Christ, becomes the wall for us, if I may extend the metaphor. Christ is our way to the top the way to God, but Scripture reveals to us that in fact there are innumerable paths upon his

scarred body. His life touches all things, and all things can be used as part of the path. This is the pervasiveness of use, and the reality the Scriptures train us to see. They help us gauge what grips we can trust and which we might be better to avoid. They also strengthen us to hold on to those things which proved allusive or even damaging to us before and use them to enjoy God, redeeming them for God's purpose in our lives.

Because the Scriptures are the means to training us to see the path, to see signs as we ought to see them, and use them as we ought to use them, we must become adept at interpreting the Scriptures. This training is what Augustine most desires to focus on in this work. All his discussion of signs and things is to prepare one to understand why the interpretation of Scripture is important and its impact for how we experience the entire world. Most importantly, however, Scripture is our means of seeing as God sees, becoming more like God, coming closer to God. Augustine reveals first just how high the stakes are, but then describes ways by which we can prepare ourselves to work at the levels necessary.

Interpreting Scripture Interpreting Life

The nature of Scripture as sign, and the various ways in which it points to God are often obscure and difficult, and Augustine firmly believes the reason is to "conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things that are easily discovered seem frequently worthless."⁸⁸ Those things which is acquired by labor is worth something, and so we must work to fulfill our duty to use the world for the enjoyment of God. The first thing we must work on is ourselves for "indifference is an

⁸⁸ OCD II.VI.7

evil.”⁸⁹ If we are not willing to work at all we are satisfied with what we should not be. If we are indifferent to our results, but merely work for its own sake we “labor in hunger.”⁹⁰ For these reasons we must first be willing to address our hearts. For no matter what skills we have, if we have no desire to work and work well for the end of enjoyment of God all our work will be for naught.

Qualifications of an Interpreter

Augustine outlines seven steps on the journey of the study of Scripture, but the first two steps are necessary to validate any further steps, for without these first two no other steps are productive, or arguably even possible. First, “it is necessary that we be turned by the fear of God toward a recognition of his will so that we know what he commands that we desire and what he commands that we avoid.”⁹¹ God always has the initiative. Just as the Incarnation of Christ is what opens up the entirety of the world to be seen as usable by us, so too must God turn our hearts toward His will before we can understand His Word. Second, “it is necessary that we become meek through piety so that we do not contradict the word of divine scripture.”⁹² The proud will be unable to read scripture productively.

Only once our lives are so ordered, may we approach Scripture and begin to face the challenge of knowledge. Our knowledge of the Scriptures falls under three basic premises for Augustine,

Every student of the Divine Scriptures must exercise himself having found nothing else in them except, first, that God is to be loved for himself, and his

⁸⁹ OCD II.VI.8

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ OCD II.VII.9

⁹² Ibid.

neighbor for the sake of God; second that he is to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind; and third, that he should love his neighbor as himself, that is so that all love for our neighbor should, like all love for ourselves, be referred to God.⁹³

If we understand the Scriptures to be working against any of these premises, then we can assume we have misunderstood its meaning. We must remember that Scripture is a sign of Jesus Christ. Christ practices His love perfectly, and so the Scriptures points to a perfect love. Therefore, to follow the signs of the Scripture to their ends is to find oneself learning evermore about properly oriented love, which is toward God.

Under these premises we begin to gain familiarity with the Scriptures. Augustine suggests that we must “first read all of them” and have “some knowledge of them, at least through reading them if not understanding them” because how can you understand that which you do not know?⁹⁴ This familiarity is a basic but vital principle. The signs we understand we are intimately familiar with. We tend to be so familiar with them in fact that we forget they are signs of anything, equating them with the thing itself. How different is a stop sign from stopping, or a word from its referent, a name from its bearer? How different is feeling cold from being cold or pain from what is causing you pain? These examples, though we may intellectually recognize the differences, demonstrate how we become intimate with the signs in our lives that we arrive instantaneously at the thing to which the sign points. Scripture is no different.

Familiarity with Scripture has many results, such as building *caritas*, gaining wisdom, and a myriad of other possibilities. Though in the context of familiarity with Scripture as sign, there are two particular results Augustine fleshes out: further

⁹³ OCD II.VII.10

⁹⁴ OCD II.VIII.12

understanding of Scripture, and further understanding of reality itself. The former has two consequences. First, becoming more familiar with Scripture allows one to continue the study of Scripture, by moving from the basic to the complex, from the open to the ambiguous. It prepares one to begin studying languages and contextual signs and the like. Second, and perhaps more importantly, familiarity also exposes people to "those things which are said openly in Scripture" such as "all those teachings which involve faith, the mores of living... hope and charity."⁹⁵ Simply by reading Scripture we are formed by and exposed to all these invaluable aspects of Christian living.

Becoming familiar with Scripture also forms us toward being able to see the Christocentric nature of reality because Scripture is itself explicitly Christocentric. Scripture becomes the metric by which we measure the way we see the rest of the world. It is the archetype, the guidelines, the lens by which our limited perspectives are formed to see the way reality truly is, which is oriented toward its creator, Christ. If Christ is the one who opened up the possibility of a pervasiveness of use, Scripture is the means to accomplishing that end in each and every individual. Scripture takes us from an abstract possibility to a functioning reality if we learn to read and interpret it properly.

Christ is Our Model Interpreter

Christ embodies all of Augustine's qualifications perfectly, making him the ideal model for interpreting Scripture and all signs. Christ is clearly and uniquely knowledgeable of and turned toward the will of God. The will of God is in fact his own will, and numerous times, though notably in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ clearly and openly asks that the will of the Father be done. Additionally, there is no meeker person

⁹⁵ OCD II. IX.14

than Christ who says, “take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁹⁶

The next set of qualifications is all about knowledge, particularly knowledge of the Scriptures as always pointing toward properly oriented love. From His earliest years Christ had deep knowledge and familiarity with the Scriptures. The best story being when Mary and Joseph lose track of Jesus and “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”⁹⁷ Christ does not merely understand the Scriptures as pointing toward love, but He is the love to which they point. Christ is love, and acts in the most loving way possible in any given situation.

Finally, Christ is more intimately familiar with the signs of this world than any other person could be. He is their creator. He knows them for what they really are, for they are an expression of Himself, of his intention, his meaning. Christ is not merely familiar with Scripture He is the Word, the truth which Scripture points to. The way in which Christ sees the world, is the most complete and beautiful way it can be seen and understood. Therefore, He is our model.

More than merely being qualified, Christ is the enabler of our interpretation by being the permanent semiotic connection between the signs of creation and the things of God. Yet, He is also our enabler of interpretation in the sense that he is our example for interpreting the world. Through the scriptures we are shown how Christ saw the world as

⁹⁶ ESV Matthew 11:29

⁹⁷ ESV Luke 2:46-47

perpetually pointing to its creator, continually drawing him to His personal relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit.

To Jesus the whole world was full of signs; the corn in the field, the leaven in the loaf, the scarlet [flower] on the hillside all spoke to him of God. He did not think that God had to break in from outside the world; he knew that God was already in the world for anyone who had eyes to see. The sign of the truly religious man is not that he comes to Church to find God but that he finds God everywhere, not that he makes a great deal of sacred places but that he sanctifies common places.”⁹⁸

Barclay’s observation is reminiscent of William’s idea of pervasiveness of use and the idea of Christ as our primary sign to God. Christ is able not only to see how things are but to open all things up so that we might see how things are. He opens the world to use and He also opens us to the world. We learn not only how Christ opens the world to us in Scripture but how we can be opened to the world through the Scriptures.

Christ was constantly using the things which His culture would encounter every single day as means to pointing toward truth. The list of examples where Christ as Barclay says “sanctifies common places” is vast.⁹⁹ We could speak of any of the parables concerning servants, any of the parables concerning livestock, yeast, seeds, fishing, wedding, coins, fig trees, widows, vines, all of these could be discussed under this paradigm. We, however, will only follow three examples to begin to understand Christ’s semiotic way of seeing the world.

⁹⁸ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1975) 185-186.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

All three examples, The Parable of the Sower, The Temptation in the Desert and The Woman at the Well, are directly related to the way in which Augustine introduces signs at the very beginning of the treatise, such as the wood “Moses... cast into the bitter water,” “that stone which Jacob placed at his head,” and “that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son.”¹⁰⁰ These ordinary everyday items and situations when interpreted rightly, when recognized through context, and familiarity with Scripture and the structure of reality are revealed as signs pointing to God. The opening of the ordinary is part of the revelation that Christ brings into the world, the revelation of the meaning of the world itself. When we know Scripture a ram, a stone or a piece of wood may remind us of Abraham and Moses. Yet, when we know Scripture through Christ, we are reminded not just of Abraham but of the true sacrifice torn by thorns and killed for the life of another. We are not just reminded of Moses and the purification of water by almighty God, but of the purification of our souls through the wood of the cross and our baptism. No longer does a stone remind us of only Jacob and the ladder to heaven, but the stone which was rolled away that the ladder of heaven might be made open to us.

*The Parable of the Sower*¹⁰¹

In the parable of the sower Christ takes a plethora of things which would have been encountered every day, circumstances which would have been nothing but normal. The Jewish people, still so closely bound to the soil, would have been familiar with the frustrations and difficulties of sowing seed in this way. They would have seen birds ruin their hard work, wasted their seed on rocks and watched as thorns choked their crops to

¹⁰⁰ OCD I.II.2

¹⁰¹ Matthew 13:1-23 ESV

death. That which is meant to bring about life they would have seen brought down into death. Not only would they be intimately familiar with the act, but the act itself and the components of the entire parable would have been utterly familiar. There is not much which could be simpler than dirt, seeds, rocks, thorns, birds, and good soil. These are all things which people would have encountered likely every single day of their lives, either personally or by proximity. Christ uses these things as a means to teach that which they would not otherwise understand. He uses the commonplace teach that which has no place, that which is true.

Additionally, many would have depended on the act of sowing for their very livelihood. This is a parable of the ordinary, yet also one of incredibly high stakes. To sow poorly is to reap a bad harvest which could cost you everything. That very act of sowing is of great importance to life itself and the end it will meet. Christ is of course aware of this and simultaneously uses an act which is intimately familiar and also vital to their way of life to teach them about the life which ought to be most important to them: their own spiritual life.

Just as Augustine speaks of the use of wood, stones, and beasts in the Old Testament so too are these simple acts and object being transformed. As parables which are a part of Scripture when we encounter such acts in the world we will be drawn to Scripture. In the same way, being a part of Scripture, we know that such acts will draw us to think of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. In so doing we may be able to enjoy God through doing those acts themselves but just as much by encountering such acts in the world. We may enjoy God through his being brought to mind, contemplating the

Scriptures which these signs point us toward, for “to the healthy and pure internal eye He is everywhere present.”¹⁰²

*The Temptation of Christ*¹⁰³

The temptation of Christ in the wilderness is a story of the power of signs. Christ at every turn is modeling for us how we ought to be turned to Scripture by all that we encounter so as to be able to not only combat that which tempts us, but also so that in all that we do, even in the midst of temptation we may enjoying and glorifying God. When Christ is shown bread, Scripture comes to mind. This is an example of a sign. Bread was not just bread to Jesus it was something which pointed him to the word of God which he knew intimately.

When Satan poses a test to Christ, he recognizes the situation for what it is. That recognition leads him to another Scripture. The very situation points. The situation itself, not just an object like bread, but the circumstances Christ is enduring point Him to the lens through which to see all circumstances: Scripture, Truth. The world, not even just the world of objects, but the very experience of His life brings about in him a response which is directed toward Scripture, and consequently God, which is why of course when He is asked to worship what other response could He have than to know to worship the Lord your God only. Indeed, He could have had any number of responses from the Psalms, from the prophets, from the Law and so on and so forth. Worship is a flood across the words and heart of the Old Testament and Christ would have recognized this instantaneously.

¹⁰² OCD I.XII.11

¹⁰³ Matthew 4:1-11

For Him, the created world, His circumstances, His actions, they are all signs which He sees the true orientation of. They are not pointing toward Satan but to God. Therefore, when He sees them, He is immediately drawn to God through them.

Christ is revealing His incredible intimacy with Scripture, which is at the foundation of all that Augustine is trying to say. We must first be familiar with the words of Scripture for they are truth. Only then can we begin to understand what they mean. Only if we know them, only if they will come to mind when we need them do they become spiritual strength. Yet that will only happen if we are familiar, if they are a part of the way we think, if they form the way we see the world. If we do not see all things through the lens of Scripture we will not be reminded of Scripture. We will be drawn to whatever else it is that we are looking at the world through, whether it be the lens of our own worth, money, glory, and power, whatever the case may be. We will be tricked and deceived by believing things are ends unto themselves or signs to something other than God.

*Woman at the Well*¹⁰⁴

What place was more common than the well? All people had to come around the well to sustain their lives, to get water. This is the site that Christ chooses to redeem this woman, the place He chooses to reveal that He is that which satisfies and sustains. Christ uses water as a sign to Himself. He is that which we need to survive. He is that which we come to in order to live. It is daily, hourly, moment by moment necessary to bring Him into oneself in order to keep living. Thirst is an affliction we all suffer from and water its universal cure. So too is Christ the cure for our thirsting souls. And so, Christ transforms

¹⁰⁴ John 4:1-45

something which every human being will encounter daily for the rest of their lives. From this moment for the rest of her life I think that woman would not look at a well the same again. Could not look at water the same ever again. For Christ had transformed it. He had revealed to her what it really points to. It is not an end unto itself, it is not merely a means to sustain your own life. It is a sign pointing to God. A sign usable for the enjoyment of the love of God. Water was forever changed, her daily routine forever changed. Suddenly her world was opened to Christ. Every day from then on there was a chance her heart would be turned to God by the mere mention of water, by the mere sight of a well in the distance. Every time she drew her water, brought it to her lips to drink, she might think of that unforgettable encounter with a man named Jesus, of the long-awaited Messiah.

This is yet again a transformation of the common, yet it is even more an affirmation of Augustine's belief that signs permeate reality. We are sustained not by water but by the spirit which we may only know through signs. The importance of being able to understand the world in this way, through Scripture, is of the utmost importance. Scripture is our sign to point to the true things of God, and only if we can see the truth can we live. Only if we know Christ can we live and be sustained, and we can only know by signs. We must understand them to be signs, we must use them as signs, and we must have faith that we are being pointed toward that which is the ultimate end, the life of the Trinity. Only then will we be truly sustained, will we truly live.

Augustine and Interpretation

By transforming that which his audience and followers would encounter most in their lives that which would have been commonplace to them, Jesus gives the potential to be extraordinary to every instance of the ordinary. Suddenly a path is opened up

whenever these things are witnessed or thought of, a path which points to himself, to God. He could have transformed obscure mystical majestic things, but instead he routinely transforms the daily, lowly, humble and ordinary. This choice is of course completely consistent with the character of the one

“⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”¹⁰⁵

The Scriptural examples of Christ’s relationship to signs showcase what it means to use all thing for the enjoyment of God. It reveals how one ought to know the world so intimately, to know Scripture so intimately, with such familiarity that one can recognize the way in which all things can be used for the enjoyment of God, and to do so as naturally as breathing. It does require our will, our desire, our rationality, but to truly know and internalize it, to understand things as they are, one must see semiotically and follow the signs’ orientation toward their final destination. We are carried along by the understanding of the sign, the desire to know God and the empowering love of Christ the incarnated second person of the Trinity, and Savior of the world.

Christ used all creation to point to Himself and therefore to God. We in turn can use all creation to point to Scripture which points to Christ who points to God. The practical implications of using signs in this way are endless. Christ uses these sorts of signs as means to combat temptation, teaching tools, prayers, and more. Not only ought the simple and every day draw us to the divine, but we know about these things through

¹⁰⁵ Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV)

Scripture. When we interpret the world it must bring us back to Scripture, but this means it must bring us back to Christ. The point of Christ's revelation of interpretation is not merely to show us how to think of Scripture but to be drawn to Himself. When we interpret our world, we must be reminded not only of Scripture but of Christ himself. He is our bread and water. He is our livelihood. He is our defense against temptation. These things can be true because he is the center of Scripture and of all reality. Therefore, to know what is real, to know Scripture, is to know Jesus Christ. To interpret the world truly is to see it as intimately connected to the life of Christ, to yourself be intimately connected to the life of Christ.

Through the intimate connections between creation, Scripture and Christ we are drawn by the everyday back to the scriptures which explicitly point us to Christ who explicitly points us to the Father. Christ models for us a life which is built around constantly following paths which lead back to the things which ought to be enjoyed, using everything for the purpose it ought to be used for. When we engage with the Scriptures our eyes are opened to the person of Christ. In light of Christ we see Scripture truly as holistically pointing to Himself. Scripture, being a mirror for reality reveals the semiotic nature of the whole created order as also pointing to Christ. Therefore, when we can see creation as the sign it is meant to be, we may use it to enliven our understanding of Scripture and to point us back to its truths. Then by being constantly drawn to Scripture by creation we are constantly drawn toward Christ. By using creation and Scripture as signs toward Christ we may then both use and enjoy Christ. We may use him as a sign to the Father, for to know him is to know the Father, and we may enjoy him for himself, as the Son of God, the savior of us all.

Conclusion

Augustine frames *De Doctrina Christiana* as a book about interpreting the Scriptures, but what becomes clear is that to interpret the Scriptures is to interpret all creation. The Scriptures and all reality are mirrors of each other. Both are bound by the nature of sign, signified and subject. Both are pointing to the perfected version of those three things. Yet it cannot be known to what they truly point until the Incarnation of Christ. By the grace and humility of God the veil is lifted and all the signs which were once obscured are made clear by the light of the Son of God made flesh. Sign and signified are bound in one subject, available to be used and enjoyed to all who are willing to come and trust Him as the Truth, the Word, the life.

Upon the revealing of the nature of all things all people are bound to the duty to use all things as they are meant to be used, for the enjoyment of God. Yet the task is fraught with difficulty and danger. Mercifully our nature is such that we value all the more that which we must win with toil and struggle.¹⁰⁶ We must learn to interpret all creation in this new way. Yet though we know it is possible we know not how without a model, someone to teach us. That person is the perfect subject, the same one who is sign and signified, is the one who demonstrates throughout his life how all things must be used. Him we know through Scripture. The clearest unapologetic sign of Christ. Through the word we may know the Word.

We must become imitators of Christ in the way he uses all things, the only way to do that is the ultimate sign of Himself. Through the scriptures we come to understand how to use all creation. We learn to interpret all things for the enjoyment of God. As we

¹⁰⁶ OCD II.VI.7

undergo this process the created order and the words of Scripture become deeply interconnected. They are woven together through constant use and companionship. As we merge Scripture and all the ordinary things which pervade our lives, we are brought closer to Christ. If all things point us to Scripture, and we know all Scripture points us to Christ, we will be constantly oriented toward Him. No longer will we see the physical and spiritual world as separate but as interconnecting signs pointed toward the same thing, the person who unites them both in himself.

Be good to your servant while I live,
that I may obey your word.
Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.
I am a stranger on earth;
do not hide your commands from me.
My soul is consumed with longing...

Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.
Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.

Psalm 119: 17-20, 36-37

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