Book Reviews

Review Symposium: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture

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Augustine's Psalter as *Vox Totius Christi*

"Search the Scriptures," says Jesus, "they testify of me" (Jn 5:39). Jesus proceeds to assert that Moses "wrote of me" (Jn 5:46). Much of the Christian exegetical tradition has been the attempt to envision how this might be so. The five review essays in this issue of *Cithara* approach this same challenge from different angles. How does one read the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture? What does it mean to say, as Augustine maintained, "The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old manifest in the New"?[1] How does one find Christ in Jewish Scripture, as the treasure hidden in the field (to use one of Augustine's favorite Scriptural images)? We are given a lapidary account (with no illustrative examples) of the Resurrected Christ doing the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27).

Augustine took this at face value: As Christ saw in "all the scriptures ... things concerning himself," so the Christian exegete is called to find Christ in all of Scripture: "Our whole purpose when we hear the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Law," writes Augustine, "is to see Christ there, to understand Christ there."[2] For Augustine, the Incarnate Christ—particularly the Crucified—is the key that unlocks Scripture's meaning.[3] Perhaps nowhere does this come alive as palpably as in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Augustine's longest and probably least read major work. From approximately 392 to 418 Augustine methodically exposited all 150 psalms verse by verse. The *Enarrationes* are a sustained attempt to find the mystery of Christ in the Psalter and in finding Christ, Augustine also found his body. Together they constitute what Augustine called the "whole Christ" (*totus Christus*). The hermeneutic operative in the *Enarrationes* is a discovery of "Christ and his Church, that total mystery with which all the Scriptures are concerned."[4] One of Augustine's great commentators expresses this interpretive principle remarkably well: "For Augustine the voice of the *totus Christus* is the radiating hermeneutical center of the Psalms."[5]

Augustine's hermeneutics finds its origin in the method of interpreting classical texts such as Homer or Virgil that he learned as a schoolboy, namely

prosopological exegesis. This standard practice of grammatical and rhetorical training involved approaching a text with the question, "Who here is the speaker?" The answer is not always immediately apparent. Most ancient texts did not have punctuation marks or spacing between paragraphs, lines, or even words (*scriptio continua*). The first task of the exegete, then, was to disentangle reams of text and locate the identity of the person speaking. Hence the term "prosopological" (derived from the Greek word *prosopon*, meaning "face"). Discovering the "face" or *persona* (identity) of the speaker in any text is the critical first step to understand its meaning.[6]

Augustine brings this training to bear on his exposition on the Psalms. He repeatedly asks throughout the *Enarrationes*, "Who here is the speaker?" It was quite possible for Augustine that one individual Psalm might have multiple *personas*. For example, the *persona* of those who say, "Let us burst their chains asunder" in Psalm 2:3 is that of "Christ's persecutors."[7] This is in contrast to the *persona* of the Incarnate Word who speaks in verse six of Psalm 2: "I have been established by him as king over Zion." Augustine explains, "This statement is obviously put into the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ himself" (*ex persona ipsius Domini*).[8]

Michael Cameron has demonstrated how Augustine's prosopological exegesis of the Psalms developed over his episcopal career.[9] Initially he followed the hermeneutical principle laid down by the Donatist exegete Tyconius.[10] The first principle given by Tyconius is that Scripture sometimes speaks of the head and sometimes of the body, but in both cases Scripture refers to one person. Augustine quotes Tyconius, "We should not hesitate when the discussion moves from the head to the body or from the body to the head without leaving the subject of the single person."[11] The task of the exegete is to discern which *prosopon* is speaking. This will ensure that nothing untoward is said of the head that is more appropriately referred to the body and vice versa. The first time Augustine uses the phrase *totus Christus* is in *En. Ps.* 17; here we witness him applying Tyconius's hermeneutic: "Now whatever is said in this psalm and cannot apply in strict terms to the Lord himself, the Head, should be referred to the Church; for here the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) is speaking, and all his members are contained in him."[12]

As Augustine's Christology developed so too did his exegesis of the Psalms. Parsing neatly within the *totus Christus* of what is said in the *persona* of the head and what is said in the *persona* of the body began to give way to a greater fluidity between the speakers – their voices became to an ever greater extent fused so that one voice sounded in both the head and the body. It was the Incarnation that, for Augustine, required and, indeed, effected this shared voice. Christ assumed human identity and spoke with our voice in the Psalms: "The Lord took their person upon himself (*quorum personam sibi imposuit*) when he said, *I was hungry and you did not feed me* [Mt 25]... here too he [is] ... speaking on behalf of one of his littlest ones (*minimi*)."[13] Tyconius's careful distinction of *persona* intended to preserve divine transcendence—it served to guard against inappropriate anthropomorphism by not attributing human weakness, fear, and penance to the "voice" of Christ. However, as Augustine grappled with the heart of the Christian faith—the profound *kenosis* of the Incarnation—the neat partition between the *personas* of head and members began to give way.

In the Incarnation Christ assumes and speaks in the voice of the *minimi*. Two repeated texts from the New Testament took paramount importance in Augustine's developing understanding of the *totus Christus*: Christ's identification with the disenfranchised in Matthew 25 and his anguished cry on behalf of his own persecuted body on the Damascus Road: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Augustine writes, "Christ still labors here.... Christ is in want here, Christ is a stranger here, Christ is still ill here, Christ is confined to prison here."[14] The Incarnate Christ became the "least of these" and remains the "least of these" by continuing to assume the identity of the *minimi* in his body.

Thus Augustine's Christology drove his developing exegesis of the Psalter. In identifying himself with the limit of human weakness and misery—"even to death on a cross"—Christ took our voice, our *prosopon*, in the many Psalms of lament, with their cries of abandonment, fear, and despair. In these Psalms we hear Christ speaking in the voice of his wounded body. Perhaps nowhere is this as poignant as in *En. Ps.* 21 with its opening cry of dereliction: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It is in Augustine's exposition on Psalm 21 (Psalm 22 in contemporary Bibles) that we can, for the first time, perceive the profound shift in his hermeneutics of the *totus Christus*. Here Augustine moves away from the careful distinction of voices mandated by Tyconius to underscore that one voice (*una vox*) speaks even in finitude, brokenness and misery.

Augustine writes, "[T]he words of this psalm are spoken in the person of the crucified one (*ex persona crucifixi*), for here at its beginning is the cry he uttered while he hung upon the cross. He speaks consistently in the character (*personam*) of our old self, whose mortality he bore (*portauit*) and which was nailed to the cross with him [Rom 6:6]."[15] Augustine has seamlessly fused the *personas* of head and body based on the Pauline theology of redemption as "union" in Christ's death and resurrection. Christ assumes Adam in himself, so that "our old man is crucified with him" (Rom 6:6). It is the "old man" Christ assumes and unites with himself (the *totus Christus*) that utters the cry of dereliction.[16]

Michael Cameron underscores the breakthrough that *En. Ps.* 21 represents for Augustine's developing hermeneutics of the *totus Christus*:

> The exposition of Psalm 21 was a watershed in his career as a Christian reader of scripture and indeed as a Christian.... The words of the psalm taken from Adam by the Crucified disclosed the very pistons that drove the engine of human redemption, and the exchange of voices between the Savior and sinner engineered a magnificent trade of life for death. This was the full emergence of *totus Christus*.[17]

The assumption of human identity in the Incarnation—especially its radical *kenosis* on the cross—gives birth to the profound union between head and body, the "great mystery" of the Church of which Paul speaks (cf. Eph 5:31-32). This union is no longer comprised of two distinct parts (head and body), as Augustine's early Tyconian exegesis suggested; rather the profound unity effected allows each to be present in the other: head in the body and body in the head.[18] Augustine writes, "Our Lord Jesus Christ is both head and body"—the one Christ is glorified in heaven and suffers here on earth.[19] Augustine sees this theology at work in Paul's sustained consideration of the

body of Christ (cf. Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12). Paul writes that "all the members of the body, many though they be, are one body, so too is Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). Augustine notes that Paul did not draw a comparison between the head and the body and Christ and the Church. Instead he stated a reality: the many members *are* Christ ("so too is Christ"): "He called the whole entity he had spoken about 'Christ'.... All of us together with our Head are Christ."[20] This shared identity required *una vox* to sound in the Psalm: "And if two in one flesh, why not two in one voice? Let Christ speak, then, because in Christ the Church speaks, and in the Church Christ speaks, and the body speaks in the Head and the Head in the body."[21]

The "wonderful exchange" (*mira commutatio/admirabile commercium*), as Augustine frequently describes humanity's unitive redemption in Christ, not only put our fragile, broken, and wounded words on Christ's lips in the Psalms, but also gives us Christ's resurrected, powerful, and victorious language sounding in the Psalms.[22] As Augustine puts it, "[I]n him we too are Christ."[23] Rowan Williams notes that, for Augustine, we are "given the right to speak with [Christ's] divine voice."[24] But this voice is not a "voice-over"—it is most authentically *our own* voice, the voice that sounds our deepest identity; the Psalms voice who we are in Christ. Even when we groan the penitential Psalms we lament our sins with, in, and as Christ.[25] Augustine points to the Psalmist who prays, *Lord, have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.*[26] Could our "sinless Head" take these words on himself? Yes, "for the voice of his members is his voice, just as the voice of our Head is our voice."[27] Augustine continues,

> We were in him (*in illo eramus*) when he said, *My soul is sorrowful to the point of death* (Mt 26:38).... [T]he members were speaking through their head and the Head was speaking on behalf of his members. This is why we can find our own voice in the psalm-verse, *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.* We were in him (*in illo eramus*) when he cried out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* ... What sins could there be in him? None whatever, but our old nature was crucified together with him.[28]

The hermeneutic of the *totus Christus* allows us to "find own voice' in the Psalms; it is not an imposition of an alien voice, but a discovery of our truest selves "in Him" (to use Paul's idiom, cf. Phil 3:9). "We were there" (*nos ibi eramus*) at Calvary, the site of that "marvelous exchange," insists Augustine.[29] He urges, "So let us recognize ourselves here.... We shall find ourselves in [Christ] as long as we remain inseparably united to the members of that body whose Head is in heaven."[30] Augustine describes the Psalter as a "mirror"; but it is a mirror in which we not only recognize ourselves, but also are transformed into our truest selves: "If the Psalm is praying, pray yourselves; if it is groaning, you groan too; if it is happy, rejoice, if it is crying out in hope, you hope as well; if it expresses fear, be afraid. Everything written here is like a mirror held up for us."[31]

Augustine's description of the Psalms as a mirror that is *constructive* of the Church finds an echo in contemporary hermeneutic and social theory that accents how a text is not only informative (describing *what* the Church is), but also performative (in a text's use identity is *created*). The transitive, gerundial, performative character of Augustine's *totus Christus* hermeneutic has been noted.[32] In praying the Psalter the Church is in a state of becoming Church.[33]

Paul Ricoeur would say that the Psalms constitute an "event" whose meaning is never fully contained within its own spatiotemporal parameters—it transcends them and is open to the world. The historical "event" of the psalm ripples beyond its own time and historical authorship so that each "performance" of the "discourse" discloses unforeseen "meaning" and is constitutive of new identities. Ricoeur maintains that the "discourse" of a text "escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its mooring to the psychology of its author."[34]

There is a great deal of commonality between Augustine's hermeneutics of the *totus Christus* and the dynamism and contemporaneity of Ricoeur's text as an ongoing "event." There are, of course, also significant elements of discontinuity between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and those of Augustine. Future interpretation of the Psalm, for Augustine, is not unforeseen and remains significantly less "open ended" than for Ricoeur. Instead, Augustine's hermeneutics are teleologically oriented to fulfilment in Christ (as he frequently notes interpreting the recurrent superscript, "to the end, a Psalm of David"). In the same vein, the meaning of the text "event," for Ricoeur, escapes the historical clutches of the author's intentions—the text breaks free of its "mooring." For Augustine, on the other hand, the divine author intends the fullness of Christological meaning to be already latent in the text spoken by the Prophet-Psalmist. Despite these clear differences, Ricoeur's hermeneutics shed light on those of Augustine: when we pray the Psalms their meaning is appropriated in new ways and becomes constitutive of our new identity. Rowan Williams underscores that, for Augustine, praying and singing the Psalms means "learning what it is to inhabit the body of Christ and to be caught up in Christ's prayer."[35] The Psalms form us and make us contemporaries with the Christ event (*nos ibi eramus*) so that we appropriate the Psalms' cadence in fresh (and fulfilled) ways. Augustine urges, "[A]ttune your own voice to that of the singer, and know the singer's voice as your own, and let the voice of your heart chime in with the voice of this psalm" (*adiungat vocem cordis sui voci psalmi huius*).[36]

The symposium of review essays in this issue of *Cithara* is devoted to exploring the theme of "Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture." This exegetical and theological enterprise remains a perennial Christian practice, the ongoing exercise of which is cause for continual self-reflection and dialogue. The five books reviewed in this symposium are recent contributions by renowned theologians and biblical scholars that offer fresh, distinct, and sensitive perspectives to this theme. While Augustine's hermeneutics of the *totus Christus* offers one example of how the Hebrew Bible might be read in light of Christ and from "within" Christ, questions surrounding this theme continue to animate and inform Christian self-identity. I am grateful for the outstanding panel of review essays that express with subtlety and nuance contemporary articulations of (and challenges to) the discovering in Scripture of what Augustine describes as "Christ and his Church, that total mystery with which all the Scriptures are concerned."[37]

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NOTES

1) *Quest. in Hept.* 2.73.
2) *En. Ps.* 98.1. I have used the translation of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* from the *Works of Saint Augustine* series and have retained this edition's practice of italicizing Augustine's quotations from Scripture.
3) Cf. *En. Ps.* 72.2.9: "May the Lord himself be near us, and with the key of his cross unlock the mystery enclosed in this verse. Significantly, the veil of the temple was rent apart when Christ was crucified, for through his passion the secret recesses of all mysteries were thrown open."
4) *En. Ps.* 79.1.
5) Michael Cameron, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999). Relevant literature on the concept of *totus Christus* in the *Enarrationes* includes Michael Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus Vox Totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins "Enarrationes in Psalmos"* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997); Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); *Michael Cameron, Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 165-212.
6) Cf. Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier: (IIIe-Ve siècles) / Vol. 2, Exégèse prosopologique et théologie* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1985); Hubertus Drobner, *Person-Exegese und Christologie bei Augustinus: Zur Herkunft der Formel una persona* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), and idem, "Grammatical Exegesis and Christology in St. Augustine," *Studia Patristica* 18 (1990): 49-63; Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language, The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
7) *En. Ps.* 2.2.
8) *En. Ps.* 2.5.
9) *Cameron, Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, pp. 165-212.
10) Augustine gives a detailed overview of the "seven rules" of Tyconius's interpretive method in *De Doctrina Christiana* 3.30-37.
11) *De doctrina Christiana* 3.31.
12) *En. Ps.* 17.5.
13) *En. Ps.* 4.2.
14) *En. Ps.* 86.5.
15) *En. Ps.* 21.1.
16) Rowan Williams writes of this passage in Augustine, 'It is as if we have an anticipation of the twentieth-century theology of Christ's dereliction developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar. The eternal difference in Trinitarian life between Father and Son is what makes possible the identification of the Son with even the most radical state of "otherness" from God or separation from God.' Rowan Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 19.
17) Cameron, "The Emergence of the *Totus Christus* as Hermeneutical Center in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian*

Interpretation of the Psalms, ed. Brian Daley and Paul Kolbet (Nore Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame), p. 216.
18) Cf. *En. Ps.* 138.21: "Many things have been said in the name of his body, but the head is speaking too, though not in the sense that they are distinct from each other like two persons: now the head and now the body. To distinguish them like that would be to divide them, and then they would not be two in one flesh. But if they are two in one flesh, do not be surprised if the two speak with one voice."
19) *En. Ps.* 142.3
20) *En. Ps.* 30.2.4. Cf. Tarsicius van Bavel, "The Concept of the 'Whole Christ'," in *Saint Augustine* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2007), p. 264.
21) *En. Ps.* 30.2.4.
22) Cf. *En. Ps.* 30.2.3: "But in fact he who deigned to assume the form of a slave, and within that form to cloth us with himself (*nos uestire se*), he who did not disdain to take us up to himself (*assumere nos in se*) did not disdain either to transfigure us into himself (*transfigurare nos in se*), and to speak in our words, so that we in turn might speak in his."
23) *En. Ps.* 26.2.2.
24) Rowan Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," 20. Michael McCarthy writes, "Augustine's most distinctive and original contribution to the history of psalm exegesis lies precisely in the conception witnessed here: that the psalm (and indeed the entire Psalter) represents in its language, its verbal prayer, the very heart of the Christian mystery—the exchange of God and humanity in the Word-made-flesh, still abiding in the *totus Christus*." McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning," in *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms*, ed. Brian Daley and Paul Kolbet (Nore Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame), p. 237.
25) Augustine is sensitive to the Apostle Paul's participatory expression of Christ's redemptive union through his death. Christ not only died "for" us, but "with" us and "in" us (Rom 6:3 and 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; 2 Cor 5:1). Cf. *Cameron, Christ Meets Me Everywhere*.
26) *En. Ps.* 40.6.
27) *En. Ps.* 40.6.
28) *En. Ps.* 40.6. Cf. 21.2.3; 37.6; 68.1.2.
29) Cf. *En. Ps.* 40.6.
30) *En. Ps.* 45.1.
31) *En. Ps.* 30.4.1. Cf. *En. Ps.* 123.3: "It is not as though these singers were strangers to us or as though our own voice were missing from this psalm. Listen to it as though you were hearing yourselves. Listen as though you were looking at your own reflection in the mirror of the scriptures." Cf. *En. Ps.* 118.4.3.
32) Cf. Michael Cameron, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999).
33) Michael McCarthy underscores how, for Augustine, the ecclesial practice of praying the Psalms effects and is constitutive of the Church. He notes the relevance of contemporary hermeneutic theories that stress the productive

and constructive nature of interpretation as formative of group identity. McCarthy suggests Augustine's ecclesiology expressed in the *Enarrationes* envisions the Church becoming itself as it interprets the Psalter: The "theological dynamism" in the *Enarrationes* expresses an "understanding of the church as a 'pluriform event' or a 'reality in process,' not as a Platonic idealization" (McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning," p. 238). McCarthy draws on Ricoeur's understanding of how the performance of a discourse is effective of the meaning of that discourse. The performance is an "event" that "makes" (*poiesis*) meaning and identity. This is, to my mind, a very helpful application of contemporary hermeneutic theory. It remains, however, only half of the equation. Augustine's Platonic proclivities entail that the "becoming" Church already participates in Christ's fullness. The "wonderful exchange" of identities effected by the Incarnation (the *communicatio idiomatum*) entails, for Augustine, that the body too *is* Christ and shares in his perfection. Of course, in praying the Psalms individual members continue to grow in their ecclesial identity (finding their voice) as members of the *totus Christus*.

34) Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 148.

35) Rowen Williams, "Augustine and the Psalms," *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 19-20.

36) *En. Ps.* 130.3.

37) *En. Ps.* 79.1.

Personalia: Book Reviews

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