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Introducing Augustine of 'Annaba'

Augustine is a towering and influential figure in World Christianity and especially in the Western Church. He is a uniting figure across Roman Catholic, mainstream Protestant, Reformed, and Evangelical churches globally. He is also a powerful example of the early Church's commitment to biblical orthodoxy, spiritual formation, rational theological reflection and critically faithful engagement with the surrounding culture. Augustine's remarkable legacy is an example of the "limitlessness of learning in pre-Enlightenment Christian history." (Gearon 2014, 160) Revered by Roman Catholics, Protestant, Evangelical scholars and in equal measure by secular philosophers, Augustine's influence seems to cross boundaries in an unparalleled fashion. Standing as both a critic of and a transmitter to the medieval and modern worlds, Henry Chadwick describes Augustine as the first 'modern man' "in the sense that with him the reader feels himself addressed at a level of extraordinary psychological depth and confronted by a coherent system of thought, large parts of which still make potent claims to attention and respect." (Chadwick 1986, 3)

This holistic system of thought is visible in the mystical/monastic movement and especially in ideas about love, happiness and self-renunciation. It is also visible in the theology and philosophy of medieval scholarship and particularly the relationship between faith and reason. His popularity in the Carolingian Renaissance, though not universal, is nonetheless very evident in the work of Peter Abelard. In the 13th Century Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* used Augustine's *De Doctrina Chrstiana* in his explanation of the nature of scriptural language. Later in the 15th Century Erasmus used Augustine's dialectical engagement with the Greco-Roman classics as a model. (Green 1999, xx) The theology of the 16th Century Protestant Reformers leaned heavily on Augustine's theology of grace (based especially on his *Confessions*) in their criticism

of medieval Catholic piety with its emphasis on the works of human effort. Later in the 18th Century enlightenment, Emanuel Kant's critique of the perfectibility of man clearly appeals to Augustine's emphasis on original sin. In reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the Romantics saw in Augustine a positive view of the affections. Though not anti-intellectual, based in Augustine they developed the use of the term 'heart' as a positive locus for measuring appropriate and fruitful theology. More recently, contemporary linguists consider Augustine as a pioneer in the critical study of non-verbal communication and finally, he is also considered by some modern psychologists to have anticipated Freud's psychoanalytical discoveries with his own exploration of the subconscious. Summarising his colossal influence Chadwick writes, "Anselm, Aquinas, Petrarch (never without a pocket copy of the *Confessions*) Luther, Bellarmine, Pascal and Kierkegaard all stand in the shade of his broad Oak." (Chadwick 1986, 3)

From Augustine to today's Algerian BMB[1] Church

Yet Augustine was also North African! He began, ended, and spent much of his life and ministry in what is now modern Algeria. Though his father was Roman and he is considered a spiritual 'son of Rome', his mother Monica, to whom he attributes the grace of God at work in his conversion, was Berber. Augustine is an emblematic character in contemporary North Africa, so much so that the former Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika used him as the central figure in the first major colloquium organised in 2000 as part of Algeria's reconciliation process after the bloody decade of violence in the 1990s.

However, despite his colossal impact on the development of Christian theology, his life, ministry and theology are relatively unknown amongst the growing Muslim background Church of Algeria today. For this growing indigenous Church, Augustine's Roman-Western orientation presents challenges. His struggles with the Donatist Church and the eventual 'victory' - through the power of Rome - over an indigenous North African resistance movement is a reminder of the dangers of the colonializing influence of centres of Christianity over the multiple particularities in the margins where the Church grows. The Algerian Church of today is one such Church in the margins whose presence and growth is linked to this same story of the particularity and universality of the early Church in North Africa.

[1] BMB stands for Believer's from a Muslim Background.

Augustine seems to have grappled with the same multidimensional vectors of liminality that face the Algerian Church today, and his expansive and long-term impact is testament to the fascinating and liberating dimension of his contribution despite predating the modern Algerian Church by almost 1600 years. To some degree therefore, the theology and pedagogy of Augustine from the 4th and 5th centuries acts as a point of continuity from the early Church to the modern context of a rapidly growing Algerian Church at the heart of a rapidly growing new BMB stream in the movement of World Christianity.

Having noted all this, one of the most surprising findings of my research was the minimal engagement from Algerian Christians with the figure of Augustine. With the exception of one respondent, a Kabyle church leader, whose journey to faith had started with an Augustinian order and his exploration of such themes as the nature of God; the Incarnation; sin and grace, none of the respondents seemed to have read any of Augustine's works. Whatever reasons there might be for this glaring omission,[2] the presence of Augustine somehow overlooks the multiple vectors of liminality in which the Algerian Church is developing.

However, for the Algerian Christian contemplating this 'broad oak' (Chadwick 1986, 3) there is also some ambiguity in Augustine's navigation of the margins in which this church is growing. This is particularly visible in the tension between the revealed authority of the Church - which though Universal, for Augustine was synonymous with the primacy of Rome - and liberating faith at work in the freedom of conscience. Whilst, according to Augustine, submitting to the wisdom and authority of Christ was the answer to the uncertainty of philosophical scepticism, nonetheless for him this submission to Christ appears to be synonymous with submission to the community of the Holy Roman Catholica. (Chadwick 1986, 27-28) It is in the margins between the particularity and universality, centres and the margins and between the West (Rome) and the rest (North Africa) that the site of a destructive liminality is evident; namely that of the Donatist schism. Augustine's critique of the Donatists was that they had undermined the universalism of the worldwide Church with an atomising and myopic particularity. For him, the Universal Church could not be reduced to one small region of

[2] One reason is the lack of availability of Augustine's writing in Algeria, in French and even more so in Modern Standard Arabic. Another reason for this omission may well be the impression that Augustine and the works of other pioneers of the early North African Church are associated intrinsically with the Roman Catholic Church. Given some of the difficulties in relations between the contemporary indigenous Protestant Church of Algeria and the Catholic Church, accessing Augustine's works seems to some Algerian BMBs like a journey to a foreign 'centre'.

the Empire in North Africa. However, the Donatists contended that particularity was the very principle of the Incarnation and that it was the holiness of the Church and not the authority of a Western Roman centrism that was the basis for the unity of the Worldwide Church. (Chadwick 1986, 77) At the time of Augustine's ordination as Bishop of Hippo in 395 A.D., the Donatist dispute had been rumbling on for 85 years. Though not condoned by their bishops, the Donatist 'faithful' had become increasingly militant, with Catholic clergy and buildings being the target of violent attacks. Although initially opposed to the use of imperial force against the Donatists, the conference at Carthage in 411 A.D. (presided over by a Catholic imperial commissioner with an apparently predetermined verdict in favour of the Catholics) provided the legitimacy for the subsequent crushing of the Donatist movement. Whilst Augustine hated violence, believing that a return to the Catholica via coercion was inappropriate,[3] nonetheless his contra-Donatist writings were used at the time, and in subsequent periods, by the Roman Catholic Church, to subdue 'marginal' movements within the World Church. This is visible in the Middle Ages when his writings were used to justify the punishment or elimination of 'heretics' and similarly in the 18th Century repression of the Huguenots in France. (Chadwick 1986, 82) For Augustine the rule of Rome, provided it was under the leadership of a converted Emperor, was the best means of ensuring 'justice' and the unity of the Universal Church. In the dispute with the Donatists he perceived the Roman Catholica (and himself as her servant) as 'doves' and the Donatists as 'hawks' (Chadwick 1986, 75-76) "as if by imperial legislation supporting the Catholic Church against pagan cults and schismatic descent such as Donatism, the Empire would become 'a Christian empire'" (Chadwick 1986, 100)

What Augustine perceived to be a 'victory' for Rome in crushing a particularistic heretical movement in the margins of North Africa, resulted in the impoverishment of the region's indigenous Berber church. With the demise of Rome in the centuries following Augustine's death, the North African Church was starved of trained bishops and pastors capable of leading it in its critical faithful mission in and beyond the context in a way that Augustine had been able to do in the context of Roman North Africa. What this episode reveals therefore is a failure of the Universal Church to navigate the liminality of Western (Roman) and North African (Numidian and Berber) Christian identity. The churches north of the Mediterranean, corresponding to the 'centre' of Rome and under the rule of the Emperor Constantine the Great, disregarded the indigenous Church in the margins of North Africa. (Canning 2004, 2)

[3] Indeed, he believed most Donatists were real believers and that their sacraments were valid. (Chadwick 1986, 80).

Augustine and the Liminality of Being in-but-not-of the World

However caricaturing Augustine as a centrist aggressor on account of his role in appealing to the power of Rome in crushing the Donatists would be a failure to appreciate the positive liberated and liberating liminality of his life and work. Liam Gearon describes this liminality as the attention of a life 'called by God' but also called 'from the world', (Gearon 2014, 161) and I would add called 'to the church' and back 'to the world'. Augustine therefore epitomises the creative and transformative potential of a liberated liminal life and mission in-between, in-both and in-beyond these contexts. His universal appeal is in large measure the result of his encounter with and ongoing discipleship in Christ and, in the liminality of his Christian and classical context. In Augustine we see an appropriate pedagogy for his context but with enduring appeal because of its liberated and liberating liminality. His formative and critical approach to Christian education and theological training was always in dialogue with non-Christian sources. According to Roger Green, "He was well aware that true advice, from whatever mind came should not be ascribed to man but to the unchangeable God who is truth". (Green 1999, 6) In this sense truth itself, over and above the medium through which it is expressed was paramount for Augustine. (Gearon 2014, 162) His *De Doctrina Christiana* (on Christian Teaching), was written to reassure Christians of the acceptability of the Bible and the biblical style in a world "still delighted by the influence of its classical heritage." (Green 1999, x-ix) Augustine's pedagogy therefore advocated and pioneered a creative dialectic between formative Christian theology and the liberal arts. For him philosophy was neither the indispensable 'handmaiden to faith' nor a 'whore to be avoided' for fear of being seduced. (Chadwick 1986, 30) At the end of his life he wrote *Retractiones* (The Retractions) in which he pulled back significantly from the essentialness of a classical education implied in some of his earlier work; he wrote, "Many holy people have not studied them (the Classics) at all, and many who have studied them are not holy." (Augustine 2010, 51)

In this sense Augustine models a concept of critical faithfulness. He legitimises classical pagan learning provided it serves salvific and evangelical goals. However, he acts as a counterpoint to the emphasis given to academic learning and scholarship in subsequent scenes of Church history. (Gearon 2014, 162) This is visible in his comment in his *Confessions* (Augustine 1961, 170) that,

> *"These men have not had our schooling, yet they stand up and storm the gates of heaven while we, for all our learning, lie here grovelling in this world of flesh and blood!"*

In the *Confessions* we have a kind of multidimensional illustration of the model of formative-critical, praxis-oriented, missional-ecclesial way of doing theology that I have called a 'liberated liminal pedagogy'. (Brittenden 2018, 227-275) Here Augustine reflects spiritually on his relationship with God and the 'signs of the times' in which he is living (*Context*). His theological formation occurs as a 'second step' (Gutiérrez 2001, 48-51) of reflection on a life lived in and for the love of God (*Mission*). He describes himself as "a man who progresses as he writes and writes as he progresses". (Augustine 1990) Augustine does this in light of the narrative of Scripture and of Christian tradition (*Bible-Story*). His purpose is to enable the development of practical spiritual wisdom and his pedagogy is characterised by an experiential and relational epistemology that is unmistakably shaped by knowing and being known, loving and being loved by God (*Identity-in-dialogue*). (Groome 1980, 159)

Augustine, Love and Pedagogy

This liberating liminal pedagogy shaped Augustine's considerable contribution to the field of education and is arguably a precursor to the movement of critical pedagogy. This can be seen most clearly in two of Augustine's works; *De Catechizandis Rudibus* (Instructing Beginners in Faith) written to a junior priest as a guide for new believers in the faith and *De Magistro* (The Teacher) written as a dialogue with his son Adeodatus as an instruction to a young teacher. (Canning 2004, 2) In these works, as well as his later *De Doctrina Christiana* we see Augustine the educational innovator. He advises teachers: to love and gain the trust of students; to have a central unifying theme (a big idea) in the presentation of subject matter and to avoid meandering from this in lessons; to alter the teaching/learning styles in order to maintain concentration of students; to differentiate material depending on the abilities of the students; to summarise well and to illustrate points with good examples. (Groome 1980, 160)

Crucially for Augustine the process and goal of pedagogy is to learn God. Not to learn about God as a philosophical category or academic discipline but to 'learn God', the God who is one's own very life with the purpose of surrendering oneself to "the one alone who can heal and transform." (Canning 2004, 2) In Augustine's words, "Without you I am my own guide to the brink of perdition." (Augustine 1961, 71) This relational and self-sacrificial knowing of God and self in Augustine is profoundly at odds with the post-enlightenment epistemology which views learning as the freedom of the

individual made in the image of the critical autonomous self. In Augustine's thinking, ethics and pedagogy are as linked as the first and second commandments.[4] Love for God (ethics) and love for neighbour (pedagogy) coexist.[5] (Canning 2004, 9) The purpose and the motivation of teaching and learning is love. For Augustine the whole Bible "tells of Christ and (calls) to love." (Augustine 1999) Here Augustine situates teaching and learning in the performance of the narrative that I describe above, whose means, method and purpose is love. (Augustine 2006) He writes:

> *"recount every event in (his) historical exposition (or in his curriculum content) in such a way that (his) listener by hearing it may believe, by believing may hope, and by hoping may love."*

In Augustine love is the 'golden thread' of all subject matter, not 'spoiling' the lines of the subject matter but holding it altogether. This love, which is both the motivation and means, is found in Christ. Augustine writes (Augustine 2006, 4.8),

> *"Christ came before all else so that people might learn how much God loves them, and might learn this so that they would catch fire with love for him who first loved them, and so that the world also Love their neighbour as he commanded and showed by his example."*

This love expressed as preferring God's schedule of activities to any that we have drawn up ourselves in turn shapes the means and the method of Augustine's pedagogy. (Canning 2004, 7) It influences a learning-centred and dialogical approach to education. Writing about the student's intellect as the very subject of education Augustine's comment in *De Magistro* seems to prefigure the Freirean critique of the 'banking model'. (Augustine 1995) He writes,

> *"Do teachers advertise that they verbally transmit their own acts of understanding, or the truths of their disciplines, for students to receive and retain? What father sends a child to school with the silly aim of finding out what the teachers understanding is? …Students, if they are ready to be called that, investigate with themselves whether what they are hearing is true, strenuously putting it to the test of their own interior truth."*

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[4] See, Matthew 22:36-40. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (NRSV)

[5] Here Raymond Canning interacts with a Philip Carey's ideas. See chapter four in Paffenroth & Hughes (2017).

This love is also the motivation for differentiation in style and method depending on the needs in the context of each learner. It is therefore both universal in scope but also particular to the individual needs of the learner. (Augustine 2006, Book 4) Augustine explains it this way,

> *"Although we owe the same love to all, we should not treat all with the same remedy. And so, for its part, this very love is in pain giving birth to some (Galatians 4:19), makes itself weak with others (1 Corinthians 9:22); devotes itself to edifying some (1 Corinthians 8:1), greatly fears giving offence to others, bends down to some, raises itself up before others. To some this love is gentle, the others stern, to no one hostile, to everyone a mother."*

Hence, we see that in Augustine the context and the goal of all Christian teaching and learning is the development of love and faith. As we have seen this is at odds with many post-enlightenment models of theological education. Many of these are based on an ontology that assumes humans are fundamentally and irreducibly rational thinking beings, what James Smith calls 'thinking-thingisms'. (Smith 2016, 4) This has given rise to a view of theological education and Christian discipleship as primarily a process of cognitive exchange rather than a transformation of the whole person. For Augustine 'knowing' and 'being' are inseparable. Wisdom is the way or route and 'knowing the truth' can only be achieved through a transformation of 'being'. (Augustine 1999, 12) Sanctification is, in this sense, both the journey and the destination to the Christians' homeland. In Augustine's terms this "progress towards the one who is ever present is not made through space, but through integrity of purpose and character." (Augustine 1999, 13) This is best expressed in what Smith calls Augustine's pinpointing of the "epicentre of human identity" (Smith 2016, 7) visible at the heart of his spiritual autobiography in the enduring declaration, "you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." (Augustine 1961, 21) This is particularly significant because it speaks to the ultimate goal of Christian education and theological training in bringing transformation to the whole person. Augustine's statement is a declaration of what we're made for, namely a relationship with the God who made us. (Smith 2016, 8)

Our 'being' is therefore liminal. It is a pursuit towards something or someone. By locating our 'being' in the heart, Augustine affirms the liminality of our ultimate purpose as the reshaping or reordering of our hearts. As Smith explains, the heart here should not be understood in sentimental terms but rather in its New Testament definition as "The fulcrum of your most fundamental longings - a visceral subconscious orientation to the world." (Smith 2016, 8) For Augustine therefore we are made to love

and we will find rest when our loves are rightly ordered to that ultimate end or "besetting anxiety and restlessness when we try to love substitutes." (Smith 2016, 10) The implication of this for Algerian liberating liminal pedagogy is that all training must aim not simply or primarily to convince or affect a change in the thinking of students but to create a hunger for love. For as Augustine writes, "love is the weight by which I act. To whatever place I go, I am drawn to it by love." (Augustine 1961, 317) This integration of knowing, being and doing is a repeated theme throughout Augustine's work. In the *City of God* (Book 6-10) it is particularly evident in his critique of the false dichotomy of passion and reason. (Chadwick 1986, 98) Augustine defends the affections as good constituents of human nature in his appeal to the right orientation of love and passion towards God and neighbour.

Probably the clearest articulation of his integrated view of teaching and learning is in Augustine's adaptation of the Ciceronian triad. In both *De Catechizandis Rudibus* and *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine expounds the merits of Cicero's triad; First, to 'teach' (Instruct) and be understood, second, to 'delight' (give pleasure) and be enjoyed and third, to 'move' (motivate to action) and affect change or be obeyed. (Augustine 1999, 117-121) Augustine argues that these three dimensions are the objective of appropriate pedagogy. The first relates to the subject matter, 'knowing' the content and how it should be presented. The second relates to 'being' and the need to inspire and bring joy and the third relates to motivating learners into 'doing' something based on what they have experienced in the learning process. (Canning 2004, 3) Crucially for Augustine this appropriate integration must be modelled by the teacher.

> *"He (the teacher) should be in no doubt that any ability he has and however much he has derives more from his devotion to prayer than his dedication to oratory; and so, by praying for himself and for those he is about to address, he must become a man of prayer before becoming a man of words."*
> (Augustine 1999, 121)

Rediscovering Augustine for the Contemporary Algerian Church

The contemporary Muslim-background Church and those seeking to encourage its growth will benefit from a 'conversation with Augustine' as a prototype (however imperfect) liberated liminal Christian pastor, educator and influencer. Augustine's relevance to the contemporary BMB Church in Algeria is not only on account of his almost universal appeal across so many streams and epochs in the Movement of World

Christianity described in the introduction above. Rather it is his life and work as a multidimensional Christian teacher and leader that are particularly pertinent for Algerian believers.

So, to conclude, here are three particular applications from the life and ministry of Augustine for the Algerian Church. The first relates to the need and desire Algerian believers have for critical theological education yet their fear of how such models of training might weaken the spiritual fervour of the church. Augustine was a deeply spiritual leader with a pastor's heart, yet also a champion of the Church's vital role in the world. Today's Algerian BMB Church is crying out for spiritual leaders with pastoral hearts who can servant-lead, train and mobilise the church in her mission in and beyond Algeria.

Second, in relation to struggle that many Algerian believers have in bridging the truths of the Bible with the reality of their context, Augustine's writing appears to be an Aladdin's cave of theological treasure yet to be mined. This son of North Africa was a critically faithful exegete of the Bible and yet equally committed to interpreting the intellectual context in which he lived. Though unquestionably committed to biblical orthodoxy, many Algerian BMBs struggle to apply the message of the Bible to the cultural and intellectual geo-political context of modern Algeria and the wider North Africa and Middle East region.

Third, in the multiple margins, between East and West, Islam and Christianity, Berber and Arab, Kabyle, Arabic and French, the contemporary BMB Church of Algeria has found itself belonging to neither one nor the other, resulting in a destructive and sometimes dehumanising liminality. Algerian believers could learn so much from Augustine about the liminality of Christian discipleship and the Church's mission in the drama of the World Christian Movement. In RPH Green's words, (Green 1999, xxii-xxiii)

> *"Today's Augustine remains a man of intense spirituality and striking insight, but he is also a multidimensional human being; a man subject to great personal and professional pressures, struggling to make sense of his past and striving towards the future, and taking thought for his own flock and the whole church while seeking to do justice to his own great mind."*

More than any other figure in the history of pre-modern or post-Enlightenment Christianity, he embodies the liberating liminality in the margins between the

particular and the universal, centres and margins and East and West, which are the very margins that Algerian BMBs find themselves in today. Although Augustine's father Patrick was a pagan Roman, his mother Monica, through whom he attributes God's grace at work in his conversion, was a North African Berber. The vast majority of Algerian BMB church today are also Kabyle Berbers. Though Augustine was born and raised in Thagaste (Souk-Ahras in modern East Algeria) - a fact which most Algerian believers are fiercely proud of - it was his classical Latin education that enabled his writing to influence multiple subsequent generations. Algerian BMBs must also therefore reconcile the importance of writing in both their mother tongue (Kabyle) and other more universal languages (such as English and French) which are likely to travel further.

Although a product of the ancient world and drenched in the Classics (Cicero, Virgil etc.) Augustine's conversion somehow set him at odds with his classical past. Despite this classical philosophical Western education his *Confessions* tell the story of a spiritual transformation at the heart of his influence. Equally, the Algerian BMB Church, despite growing up with an Arab-Islamic education have experienced a transformation that sets them apart from the world of Islam. As Augustine was able to do with his classical education the Algerian BMB Church has the potential to have a multi-generational impact in and beyond the North Africa Middle east Region if, like Augustine, they can find a way to communicate the Gospel within the idioms and metaphors of the world of Islam.

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