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Book Review of *On Love, Confession, Surrender and the Moral Self*, by Ian Clausen

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Ian Clausen's *On Love, Confession, Surrender, and the Moral Self* is an insightful, erudite, and skillful exploration of the early thought of Augustine. While attentive to scholarly debates regarding the historical Augustine, the author manages to present the complexity and depth of Augustine's theological and philosophical project in a manner that is at once coherent and compelling. This review analyzes the major themes of the book as previewed in the book's title and proposes potential avenues of further discourse.

Love is central to Augustine's thought. Clausen notes that for Augustine love may be understood as "the motion that animates the soul" (1). While love can be idealized "to the point of absurdity," the other extreme is to "discount and trivialize its real-world significance" (17). Contrasting Augustine's account with the modern "buffered self" or "self-made self, existing unto itself," the author explores the significance Augustine attributes to his relationship with his mother, Monica, and draws theological implications: "As the infant cries out to its mother for milk, so Augustine cries out to his God for understanding" (18). In the author's view, "locating the self through the other and mother" poses a challenge to "modern notions of the place of humanity." At the same time, in order to understand Augustine correctly, one must carefully distinguish between human loves and the divine love lest one commit another modern error, namely, that of idolizing the former by investing it with divine attributes.

One of the defining characteristics of human love is that it seeks after wisdom. Love wants to know in order to love and to love in order to know. Drawing from *The Academics*, the author presents Augustine's account of philosophy as linked to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Obstacles, then, are despair, skepticism, laziness, lust, and most of all pride understood here as "a motive buried deep in the human heart: the desire to be like God" (33). Pride is antagonistic to one's true location as a fallen human lover and attempts to conceal that status by way of responsibility transference to "an alien race of darkness or second soul" or God (108). It is for this reason that the Manichees cannot correctly engage scripture "in a spirit of reverent inquiry" but instead are capable only of "captious fault-finding" (34). In addition to coming up with wrong answers, pride also asks

the wrong questions (or asks them in the wrong spirit) which may go some way in explaining early Augustine's wrong turning in asking *unde malum faciamus*.

There may be a tension in Augustine's philosophy and theology, as portrayed by Clausen, here (Clausen accurately notes that the distinction between philosophy and theology is anachronistic when applied to Augustine's thought). On the one hand, it seems as though all lines of inquiry are not only permissible but positive moral duties to "ask, seek, and knock" so long as this is done "in a spirit of reverent inquiry." On the other hand, there are certain conclusions that faith declares out of bounds before the examination begins. For example, with regard to Augustine's view of the problem of evil, Clausen states as follows:

"God is good, so God does not commit evil. God is just, so God is right to punish evil. No other conclusions are permitted by our faith; and yet, we wonder, why should faith stand in the way of philosophy? Why should we presuppose these things about God?" (106)

Drawing from Augustine, Clausen responds that "faith does not inhibit the inquiry, but sharpens it" (106). But is it an authentic inquiry if arriving at a prohibited conclusion (or refusing to take them off the table) is evidence of one's prideful sinfulness and displacement? Is it really seeking if one predetermines in advance what one will find? The answer, perhaps, has something to do with faith seeking understanding (115).

The answer also involves the posture of surrender implied by confession. The moral self, then, according to the author, "refers to the place of personal reckoning and conversion—a place that enfolds the other terms into itself" (2). As depicted by the author, the moral self is precisely the place to which Augustine is trying to lead us and also the place we are trying to escape. What prevents us from entering the place of the moral self before God? Again, it is pride. Clausen illustrates the point by way of reference to Augustine's reading of Genesis directed against the Manichees:

"Invited yet a second time to clarify events (Gn. 3:11) Adam offers the fateful response, 'The woman whom thou gavest to with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate' (Gn. 3:12). For Augustine, those words condemn Adam in his place. They show that he occupies no the place of confession, but a dangerous suspension over 'the way things are'" (35).

Human beings repeat and relive the pattern of Adam's fall throughout their lives as is the postlapsarian condition. The alternative is Augustinian interiority, which the author frames as "a strategy of reclaiming the moral self." In Clausen's view, by "inside" Augustine means "conscientious awareness of oneself before God." Here one also finds "the image of God within—or rather, the image to which humans are being converted, *ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*" (87).

The inward turn also leads us to Christ the Teacher "who inwardly illuminates the soul, and [is] the Form by which intellect achieves its capacity" (86). Augustine ultimately arrives at the view that this entire process starts and ends with God's grace, and the author surveys theories about the implications of the development of Augustine's thought regarding the relation of grace to free will (122-23). Clausen's larger point, however, is that Augustine's early works may be read as an attempt to bring the reader to a place of confessing the weight of a love that "finds its object in the God who is love" (125). In this way, to enter the moral self is not an escape into otherworldliness but rather a return to the location the displaced self most fears, the place where God asks: "Where are you?" (31). Pride is the place to which fallen humanity retreats; the moral self is the place to which we are reluctantly led back by God's grace.

Summing up, *On Love, Confession, Surrender, and the Moral Self* is an astute examination of Augustine's early thought. Responsive to the nuance and depth of that thought as well as scholarly treatments of the same, the

author offers a valuable and fresh contribution to the field. As Augustine once did, Clausen's book invites readers to take their place in the quest for truth and meaning that animates a happy life.

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Ian Clausen is Arthur J. Ennis Postdoctoral Fellow at Villanova University, USA. He previously held a two-year post at Valparaiso University as a Lilly Postdoctoral Fellow. His research centers on Augustine and the Augustinian moral tradition, and extends to 21st-century debates on technology, moral theory and formation, and the good life. His publications appear in journals such as *Augustinian Studies*, *Religions*, *Expository Times*, *Radical Orthodoxy*, and *Studies in Christian Ethics*. He is a former British Marshall Scholar.

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