

EUSEBIUS' *LIFE OF CONSTANTINE* AND AUGUSTINE'S *CITY OF GOD*: In pursuit of a politically relevant Christianity

Introduction

My approach in this paper will be to describe and critique Eusebius from the perspective of the church's role and calling to be the agent of the kingdom of God to the world. I will suggest that his treatment of the life of Constantine falls short of this task seriously and that this is due to his over-realised eschatology. This causes him at worst, to mistake Constantine's Rome for the kingdom of God, and at best, to fail to critique or challenge the Roman Empire with the kingdom of God in the way that the church has to, if it is to have a positive counter-cultural role in society. I will suggest that this is particularly the result of his inability to recognise that hierarchical rulership, and military domination are inimical to the kingdom of God. I will further show that this inadequacy of understanding is influenced by a neo-platonic separation of politics and religion that, as we will see, he shares with Augustine. This prevents him from giving the military and economic policies of empire central place in his analysis, despite their centrality to the teachings of Jesus and the rest of scripture.

Using the results of this analysis, and recognising the need of the church not only to positively critique society but serve it with the values and life of the kingdom of God, I will proceed to evaluate and critique Augustine's *City Of God*. I will aim to show that it is an example of under-realised eschatology that at worst regarded the Roman world as inconsequential to the kingdom of God, and at best used it as an advantageous context, when purged of idolatry, for the church's journey to an immaterial world. I will seek to demonstrate that the roots of this theological weakness are revealed in three distinct but inter-linked strands of Augustine's thought. These are his doctrine of God, in particular the immutability and inscrutability of his being, the subordinate status of the material world and the essential impurity of sexual intercourse.

I will aim to show that the eschatological extremes of both these writers have a similar effect on the church. The one causing it to over-rate the status quo and so fail to interface with it critically, the other causing it to keep from interfacing with it at all fundamentally. I will further demonstrate that they are both predicated on a neo-platonic view of the world. The overall impact of both is the failure to have a serious positive political impact on society in the way that is intended for the good news of the kingdom of God and the church as its agent. The obvious conclusion is that the separation of the spiritual from the material in the manner of neo-Platonists cannot provide the theoretical base for the pursuit of a politically relevant Christianity. The fact that the influence of this separation began so soon and has been so predominant in Christian history poses one of the greatest challenges to the recovery of a proper understanding of the kingdom of God and the role of the church in society.

A. EUSEBIUS'S LIFE OF CONSTANTINE

By the time Constantine was proclaimed emperor in York in 306AD, in place of his father Constantinius, the Roman Empire had lasted already for five hundred years and the city for more than a thousand. The Empire would continue as a political power in the west for another one hundred and seventy years, and in the East for another eleven hundred and fifty. The so-called 'golden age' of Rome had come to an end by the beginning of the Severan dynasty at the end of the second century AD and it was now

in a slow decline. This is the period that historians describe as the Late Empire. For the fifty years from 235AD to 284AD there had been military anarchy and nearly twenty emperors. However this period had been brought to an end by the reforms of the emperor Diocletian who established the Tetrarchy, which had now united the Empire for twenty years under the leadership of four emperors, known as Augusti. Caesars were emperors in waiting.

When Constantine was proclaimed emperor in 306, it was as emperor of the West, and therefore one of four Roman emperors at the time. The others were Galerius, Severus and Maximian (who had recently abdicated but re-appointed himself). The situation was highly volatile and made more so because Galerius appointed Licinius as emperor, and although Constantine had been proclaimed to be the emperor by his own army, the Praetorian Guards had proclaimed Maxentius as emperor in Constantinius's place. On top of this, Constantine was one of two Caesars waiting in hope of the emperor's crown, the other being Maximinus. Soon after this Severus was deserted by his men and captured and slain by Maxentius the result being that there were now six emperors or claimants! In 308AD Galerius appointed both Constantine and Maximinus as emperors and there remained six emperors until the death of Maximian in 310AD and Galerius in 311AD. It is against this backdrop that Eusebius begins his *Life*.

As with other writings of this period, both Eusebius and Augustine collate their material in several books and the presenting style is more of a list of situations and issues rather than an obviously organised argument. Although their translators have attempted, mainly helpfully, to make the material more accessible by breaking it up into many chapters, with sub-headings, as with the Bible, it is still impossible to avoid the sense of a list. While Augustine is much more structured and intentional than Eusebius, and at least gives occasional reminders of where we have been and directions as to where we might be heading, the presentation has much in common. This makes it difficult to provide a narrative overview of their work without presenting another, if shorter, list of their subject matter. For which reason I will only attempt a broad sweep of their material by way of an overview.

Eusebius was himself a confidant of the emperor. He became Bishop of Caesarea in around 313AD, having lived and worked there, probably as a presbyter of the church, for many years previously. It is likely that he was born around 260AD. So he had lived through the latter part of Rome's fifty years of military anarchy and certainly the several years of persecution and martyrdom of Christians under Diocletian of which he writes elsewhere.

He collates his material into four books:

Book 1. In the first ten chapters Eusebius begins with Constantine's death, and embarks on a eulogy extolling Constantine's character, faithful discipleship, thirty years reign, and political success. This is followed by a further ten chapters likening Constantine to Moses and describing the nascent Christian character of his father Constantinius. At this point we come to the death of Constantinius and the army's proclamation of Constantine as Emperor of the West, a position that he soon substantiates with their help with victories over Barbarians and Britains. As he resolves to establish his position within the empire as a whole, Eusebius describes Constantine's famous vision.

“He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS”¹

He describes how Constantine sat among his workers describing the vision as they fashioned it into the standard with which he went to war.

The next twenty chapters describe the standard in detail and the way in which his vision led him to study the scriptures after which he went to Rome and conquered his rival Maxentius.

“When in his flight before the divinely-aided forces of Constantine... first the wretch himself, then his armed attendants and guards, even as the sacred oracles had before described, ‘sank as lead in the mighty waters’”²

Chapters 39-48 describe his entry into Rome, the honour he showed the Bishops, the church buildings he provided, his care for the poor, the execution for treason of his rival Maximinus and the celebration of the first ten years of his reign. The first book finishes with an account of how the emperor Licinius was oppressing the East of the Empire and attempted to conspire against Constantine and the church, banishing Christians, confiscating their property and dismissing them from their positions in the military. Finally he initiated a full-scale persecution on the churches which the emperor Maximian joined in with until the latter

“Fell prostrate, smitten by God’s fiery dart, and his whole body consumed by the stroke of divine vengeance; so that all trace of the original lineaments of his person was lost, and nothing remained to him but dry bones and a skeleton-like appearance.”³

Book 2. The first twenty chapters of the book are taken up with Constantine’s altercation with and victory over Licinius. Eusebius describes Constantine’s motivation on behalf of the persecuted Christians, how prayer and the supernatural power of his standard secured the victory.

“He retired, as his custom was before battle, to the privacy of his tabernacle, and there employed his time in prayer to God. Meanwhile he strictly abstained from anything like ease, or luxurious living, and disciplined himself by fasting and bodily mortification, imploring the favour of God by supplication and prayer, that he might obtain his concurrence and aid, and be ready to execute whatever he might be pleased to suggest to his thoughts.”⁴

The next twenty-two chapters describe the reinstatement of the Christians who had lost property and position under the persecutions, and the passing of laws to preserve their freedom. Eusebius quotes extensively and verbatim from the letter that Constantine sent throughout the empire:

“And now, with such a mass of impiety impressing the human race, and the commonwealth in danger of being utterly destroyed, as if by the agency of some pestilential disease, and therefore needing powerful and effectual aid; what was the relief, and what the remedy that Divinity devised for these evils?...I myself, was the instrument whose services he chose, and esteemed suited to the accomplishment of his will.”⁵

The next section takes us to the end of Book 2 and is concerned with the enactment of laws against the pagans and the power given to the bishops. In a letter to Eusebius

¹ The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol.1 p490

² *ibid.*p493

³ *ibid.*p498

⁴ *ibid.*p503-4

⁵ *ibid.*p507

himself Constantine instructs them to require both national and provincial authorities to release funds for the repair of church buildings and the construction of new ones. Secondly it describes Constantine's initial attempts to bring unity into areas of theological controversy in the church in various parts of the empire, from Africa to Asia, and again Eusebius quotes extensively from Constantine's own letters.

"As far, then, as regards the Divine Providence, let there be one faith, and one understanding among you, one united judgement with reference to God. But as to your subtle disputations on questions of little or no significance, though you may be unable to harmonise in sentiment, such differences should be consigned to the secret custody of your own minds and thoughts"⁶

Book 3. This book shows the growing scope of the emperor's involvement in the life of the Roman church. The first twenty chapters are mainly taken up with the Council of Nicea and the events surrounding it. Eusebius is at pains to point out the representative and inclusive scope of the council and Constantine's achievement in bringing it together. He quotes extensively from his address to the council and his letter following it. In these Constantine gives more attention to the issue of Easter and the need to diverge from Jewish practice than he does to the controversial question of Christ's being as raised by the teachings of Arius which was the major theological area of controversy addressed.

The second twenty chapters of the book describe Constantine's project to clear the supposed site of the resurrection where a temple to Venus had been erected and the building of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in its place.

"On the very spot which witnessed the Saviour's sufferings, a new Jerusalem was constructed, over against the one so celebrated of old, which, since the foul stain of guilt brought on it by the murder of the Lord, had experienced the last extremity of desolation, the effect of divine judgement on its impious people. It was opposite this city that the emperor now began to rear a monument to the Saviour's victory over death, with rich and lavish magnificence, and it may be that this was the second and new Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets, concerning which such abundant testimony is given in the divinely inspired records."⁷

The book's final section is taken up with Constantine's extensive church building programme, his extensive destruction of idol temples and images, his intervention to prevent Eusebius being removed from Caesarea to Antioch and his edict against heretics.

Book 4. The first twenty chapters are given over to describing the consolidation and spirituality of Constantine's rule, how liberal he was even in his application of taxes, how fair and prayerful in his conquests, and how exemplary in his personal spirituality. Eusebius describes how he prayed in his palace and encouraged greater spirituality among his soldiers, even having the sign of the cross engraved on their shields.

"The emperor himself prescribed the prayer to be used by all his troops, commanding them to pronounce the following words in the Latin tongue: 'We acknowledge thee the only God: we own thee as our King, and implore thy succor. By thy favour we have gotten the victory: through thee we are mightier than our enemies. We render thanks for thy past benefits, and trust thee for future blessings. Together we pray to

⁶ *ibid.*p518

⁷ *ibid.*p529

thee long to preserve us, safe and triumphant, and our emperor Constantine and his pious sons."⁸

In the second segment, there is more still of his zeal towards the churches and further legislation against pagan practices, together with various letters to Eusebius and mention of towns given Roman city status because of their Christian practice.

Finally, Eusebius covers the instatement of Constantine's three sons as Caesars, the Council of Tyre, and the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of his reign. The book finishes with the building of the church in Constantinople and Constantine's sickness, death and funeral. He concludes as he began, on a note of euphoria:

"Standing, as he did, alone and pre-eminent among the Roman emperors as a worshipper of God... he was accounted worthy of such honours as none can say have been attained to by any other; so that no one, whether Greek or Barbarian, nay, of the ancient Romans themselves, has ever been presented to us as worthy of comparison with him."⁹

It is astonishing to consider that throughout the whole of his account of Constantine's life there is not a single critical comment about any aspect of his life or character.

This leads us to allow for the possibility that the purpose of his account was to provide an official eulogy on the life of his emperor. Was this the reason for adopting a literary form appropriate to that task rather than the role of a historian and a bishop? Yet Eusebius is a historian, one of the first ones of the Christian era, and as a recognised senior bishop of the church someone called to a watching role among the Body of Christ. The reality is that it was these roles that gave him occasion to reflect and write about Constantine, and the reason we must question what he did with the opportunity.

Whether or not Eusebius failed to critique Constantine because it was not his intent, or because he had nothing critical to say, the fact remains that his work has had the impact and influence of an historical account carrying spiritual weight and has to be critiqued as such.

I suggest that the primary reason for his suspended judgement lies in his euphoric assessment of Constantine's impact on the church and its history at that point in time. His expectation of an imminent eschatological breakthrough in history led him to the conclusion that Constantine, and the opportunity for the church that he was providing, was that breakthrough or was opening up the way for it. There are at least three statements in his *Life* that strongly suggest this. The first is found in Eusebius initial introduction.

"And being pleased to make him a representative sovereign of his own power, he (God) displayed him as the conqueror of the whole race of tyrants, and the destroyer of those God-defying giants of the earth who madly raised their impious arms against him, the supreme king of all."¹⁰

The second I have already quoted above in the context of the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

⁸ *ibid.*p545

⁹ *ibid.*p559

¹⁰ *The Life of Constantine: The Nicene ad Post-Nicene Fathers Volume 1* p482

“And it may be that this was that second and New Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets, concerning which such abundant testimony is given in the divinely inspired records.”¹¹

Thirdly, in Book 2 after recording Constantine’s victory over Licinius, his reversal of the persecutions and his re-instatement of the Christians he states “The appearance of such a monarch to the human race was indeed a marvellous event, and such as the world’s history had never yet recorded.”¹²

In a real sense, for Eusebius, the Eschaton had arrived.

How could Eusebius have come to such a conclusion, when despite his very real relief of the Christians oppression and suffering, Constantine was, in terms of Christian biblical exegesis, closer to an anti-Christ or Satan masquerading as an angel of light?

For Eusebius, Constantine as pinnacle of the hierarchical order was simply reflecting God’s order on earth.

But even in Old Testament times God had made it clear to his people that hierarchical kingship was not the way of life for humanity in the kingdom of God. The prophet Samuel had conveyed this clearly to the people but they had not listened.¹³ When Christ came they tried to make him king but he went to the mountain to pray instead.¹⁴ His words were unequivocal:

“But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be so among you.”¹⁵

The political implications of this were highly relevant in days of influence such as the church had under Constantine, who seems to have genuinely sensed Christ’s challenge in this statement when he set up the arrangements for the council of Nicea. More than two hundred and fifty bishops were present with their presbyters and other helpers. He arranged the room in a hierarchical manner, although his golden seat was a low one brought out for him after he had walked to the upper end of the seats and he did not sit until the bishops, who had stood for his entrance, beckoned him to do so. However the question of the emergence of the bishops, their relation to ‘their’ presbyters, the emergence and differentiation of the two, the acceptance and differentiation of rank, none of this is remarked on, analysed or explained.¹⁶

Nor does Eusebius critique the later different situation that pertained at the banquet to celebrate Constantine’s twentieth anniversary as emperor. Instead he praised it as a sign of the coming kingdom of God.

“Not one of the bishops was wanting at the imperial banquet, the circumstances of which were splendid beyond description. Detachments of the bodyguard and other troops surrounded the entrance of the palace with drawn swords, and through the midst of these the men of God proceeded without fear into the innermost imperial apartments, in which some were the emperor’s own companions at table, while others reclined on couches arranged on either side. *One might have thought that a picture of*

¹¹ ibid.p529

¹² ibid.p506

¹³ 1 Sam8

¹⁴ Jn6:15

¹⁵ Mtt20:25-26

¹⁶ This is especially interesting given the hermit’s advice to the Celtic bishops when they met with the Roman bishops in Cricklade in 692 as recorded by Bede. If the Romans stood when they entered they should submit to them because they were humble, but not otherwise. The Venerable Bede: *A History of the English Church and People* Barnes and Noble p102

Christ's kingdom was thus shadowed forth, and a dream rather than a reality."¹⁷
(My italics)

On the subject of military domination, once again the Old Testament is clear.

On the comparatively rare occasions when it justifies war it is in the context where Israel is viewed as the direct instrument of divine judgement. Not only was this comparatively rare in the Old Testament, there is no biblical ground for it in the New Testament which fills up the rarity with the vicarious atonement of the cross. But Eusebius evaluates and describes Constantine's battles in terms of the Old Testament era instead of the kingdom of Christ that 'makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth.'¹⁸

Constantine's famous conversion vision is obviously relevant here:

"He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of the cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS."¹⁹

Eusebius reveals no understanding of its sub-Christian nature or makes any attempt to critique it, despite the obvious key gospel texts such as

"Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.'"²⁰

And

"Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.'²¹

It is not as if there was no valid alternative interpretation to the vision. The vision of the cross and the concept of conquering through the cross are fundamental New Testament theology. But it does not mean that God calls us to military domination through war.

The Old Testament prophet Amos has much to say about economic oppression and neglect of the poor as the means of group, city or national prosperity. Ezekiel explains the foundational reason for the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy."²²

Examples abound. Jesus said

"And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."²³

While Eusebius does describe Constantine's concern for the poor²⁴, and his reduction of taxes²⁵ this is only on a personal basis and there is no attempt to consider or debate the imperial economic system.

¹⁷ ibid.p524

¹⁸ Ps46:9

¹⁹ ibid.p490

²⁰ Mtt26:52

²¹ Jn18:36

²² Ez16:49

²³ Lk12:29-34

²⁴ ibid.p494

Given that the examples of hierarchical rulership, military domination, and economic dependence are such contradictions to the values of the kingdom of God, the next step is to ask why Eusebius, (and many after him) miss the political implications of the clear teachings of Christ on the subject. This brings us to the Neoplatonic separation of the spiritual and material, the religious and the natural, that Eusebius appears to have taken for granted from the outset of his *Life*.

“It is my intention, therefore, to pass over the greater part of the royal deeds of this thrice-blessed prince; as for example, his conflicts and engagements in the field, his personal valour, his victories and successes against the enemy, and the many triumphs he obtained: likewise his provisions for the interests of individuals, his legislative enactments for the social advantage of his subjects, and a multitude of other imperial labours which are fresh in the memory of all; the design of my current undertaking being to speak and write of those circumstances only which have reference to his religious character.”²⁶

This is made clear again in Constantine’s own words in his declaration to the heathen population of several cities.

“Now I am well aware that they who are sincere in the pursuit of the heavenly hope, and have fixed this hope in heaven itself as the peculiar and predominant principle of their lives, have no need to depend on human favour, but rather have enjoyed higher honours in proportion as they have separated themselves from the inferior and evil things of this earthly existence.”²⁷

This ontological position effectively disassociates the kingdom of God from the kingdom of this world. But the biblical position locates the kingdom of God immanently as well as imminently. It will come soon precisely because it is impacting and penetrating the material world now. It is the church’s task to co-operate with and assist this penetration of society. It follows that if the immanence fails, the imminence is delayed. The kingdom of God impacts individual character precisely because it provides individual and corporate values for living. For the same reason it demands entry into the political as well as the personal sphere. It does not lend itself to the separation of the spiritual and material worlds.

B. AUGUSTINE’S CITY OF GOD

Augustine was born in 354AD and died in 430AD.

He was a Roman African, born in Thagaste, a market town in what is now Eastern Algeria. In those days, more than two centuries before the Muslims conquered North Africa, the Mediterranean basin was one culture, dominated by rich colonial provinces. North Africa supplied Italy with grain and African wealth often exceeded that of the Italians. Even though Augustine was a country boy whose father only owned a few slaves and a few acres there was plenty of opportunity for him to access the great authors of his day. Although he learnt Greek in school he preferred to read in Latin if possible. The schooling in Thagaste was not much good in Augustine’s view and after his father died he secured the financial support of a wealthy neighbour when he was nineteen and went to study in Carthage, which was the epicentre of Roman Africa. There he was impacted first by the writings of Cicero, and although he briefly investigated the bible (his mother was a devout Christian) he was more drawn

²⁵ *ibid.*p541

²⁶ *ibid.*p484

²⁷ *ibid.*p507

to the occult theosophy of Mani. Mani founded an influential cult typified by its revulsion with the physical world and advocated a highly ascetic morality. The Manichees regarded 'the lower half of the body' as the work of the devil. They had two grades of adherent, the Elect who were celibate, and the Hearers, one of which Augustine became. He had been in a sexual partnership with a young woman since he was seventeen and continued living with her for thirteen years until he moved to Milan to become Professor of Rhetoric after periods of teaching in both Carthage and Rome. Throughout this whole time he remained closely associated with the Manichees. When he arrived in Milan he was thirty and had begun to look for alternative views of reality. It was at this time that he met and associated with Christian intellectuals. It was one of these who drew him into the serious study of the Neoplatonists, in particular, Porphyry and Plotinus. They viewed reality as a hierarchical chain of being with God at the summit. They advocated the suppression of the passions and physical senses for the attainment of knowledge. They were strongly opposed to Mani's dualism. It was the strong interest of the Milan Christian intellectuals that brought him what he perceived as help from the Neoplatonists, particularly in the tension between his struggle for spiritual knowledge and his sexual drive. He soon became convinced that the step from Plato to Christ was a short and simple one. He increasingly understood the writings of Paul in terms of the struggle between the physical passions and the spiritual life. In his *Confessions* he describes how he heard a voice telling him to pick up and read the scriptures and that the book simply fell open at the words: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."²⁸

He resolved not to marry, to be celibate, to resign his city teaching post, to be baptised and to pursue aesthetic community life. In 388, after the death of his mother, he returned permanently to Africa, where he set up an experimental lay community in his hometown. Two and a half years later he was ordained presbyter of Hippo, a port forty-five miles away where he established a monastic community and where he remained until he died in the last days of African Rome at seventy-six years of age.²⁹

The *City of God* was begun in 413AD when he was fifty-nine and completed when he was seventy. So it was written more than seventy years after the death of Constantine and completed only thirteen years before Vandals conquered Carthage and the Empire in Africa where Augustine was based (only six years after his death). In another fifty years the Roman Empire in the West came to an end. Only three years before he began to write *City of God* the Roman world had been shaken by the sack of Rome, the 'eternal city', by Alaric's Goths and this formed the immediate background to the work.

The book consists of two main parts and twenty-two books.

²⁸ Rom13:14

²⁹ Notes on Augustine's life drawn from Henry Chadwick *Augustine*

PART 1

The first part is made up of the first ten books and is given to a discussion against the cult of the gods. In Augustine's own words:

"The first five books have been written against those who imagine that the gods are to be worshipped for the sake of the good things of this life, the latter five against those who think that the cult of the gods should be kept up with a view to a future life after death."³⁰

Book 1 deals with the accusation that the sack of Rome was the result of deserting the old gods for Christianity and discusses the fact that neither the pagan gods nor the Christian God saved Rome from destruction.

"Good and bad are chastised together, not because both alike live evil lives, but because both alike, though not in the same degree, love this temporal life. But the good ought to have despised it, so that the others might be reformed and corrected and might aim at life eternal."³¹

In **Book 2** Augustine sets himself to show the depravity of the old gods in strong words and no uncertain terms, and in **Book 3**, looks at the disasters that afflict mankind and considers whether the worship of the ancient gods gave any protection from these. In **Book 4** he recaps his purpose and progress so far.

"Throughout all the three books now completed, I have pointed out the consolations which God, even in the midst of the horrors of war, has bestowed through the name of Christ, which the barbarians hold in such respect – consolations foreign to the normal usage of war, granted to good and bad alike, in the same way as God 'makes the sun rise on good and bad, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.'³²

In **Book 5** Augustine enquires 'why God was willing that the Roman Empire should extend so widely and last so long'. He develops the argument that some faults are nobler than others, especially the love of the praise of men.

"The kingdoms of the East had enjoyed renown for a long time, when God decided that a Western Empire should arise, later in time, but more renowned for the extent and grandeur of its dominion. To suppress the grievous evils of many nations, he entrusted this dominion to those men, in preference to all others, who served their country for the sake of honour, praise and glory, who looked to find that glory in their country's safety above their own and who suppressed greed for money and many other faults in favour of that one fault of theirs, the love of praise."³³

He suggests that the Romans who loved the praise of men, but subjugated greater sins with it, come into the category of those described by Jesus 'who have their reward' in distinction from the heavenly reward.

In **Books 6 and 7** Augustine continues to draw heavily on Varro, the ancient Roman writer on the gods in a discussion which grows increasingly turgid. In his *Augustine* Chadwick helpfully wonders why he used Varro so much when he could have drawn on his much more recent African experience:

"The contemporary pagan intellectuals, perhaps in self-defence, developed strongly antiquarian interests, as one can see in Macrobius' *Commentary on Scipio's Dream* or his *Saturnalia*. Their argument against Christianity said that it was not the pristine tradition. Augustine set out to show, from unimpeachable authority, just how uninspiring and embarrassing the pristine stuff was."³⁴

³⁰ *ibid.*p426

³¹ *ibid.*pp15-16

³² *ibid.*p137

³³ *ibid.*p202

³⁴ *ibid.*p98

Book 8 brings Augustine to explain why Platonists still accept some forms of idolatry. This is particularly important for him, as he regards them as very close to Christianity. Here Augustine examines the teachings of natural philosophy in so far as it touches on theology, particularly those who go beyond Varro's 'world soul' views but still allow idolatry, and especially Plato, who was a disciple of Socrates. Augustine esteems Socrates highly and Plato higher still.

"Among the disciples of Socrates it was Plato who deservedly achieved the most outstanding reputation; he quite overshadowed all the rest."³⁵

Augustine is at pains to preserve Plato's integrity in this. He draws on the Platonist Apuleius to explain that their argument is that all gods are morally good, just a little further down the chain of being than the One. Demons are between gods and men. It is the demons that engage in the obscenities of the stage shows, that Augustine so abhors, and not the gods. He is able to cite the fact that Plato drove the poets of the stage shows from his city to show that he at least is not allowing that these acts are good. There is important material, particularly on the being of God in this and the next two chapters that we will return to.

In **Book 9** Augustine raises the question of whether man, though mortal can be happy: "Whether man can be both mortal and happy is itself a vexed question. Some have formed a low opinion of man's condition, denying that man is capable of felicity in this mortal life. Others have held a more exalted view of the human state, and have dared to say that those who are possessed of wisdom can be happy, though mortal... The more credible and probable position is that all men, as long as they are mortals, must needs be wretched."³⁶

On the back of this he explains our need of a mediator who is divine as well as human who will deliver us from the wretchedness of mortality.

Book 10 Deals with the failure of the Platonists to grasp the theology of the incarnation, and Christ's once for all sacrifice as the universal way of salvation. Drawing on and targeting Porphyry, who he regarded very highly, Augustine attempts to explain how he could possibly be exposed to Christianity and not embrace it:

"That such a way exists is not doubted by a man so exceptionally talented as Porphyry... for what he says is not that the way does not exist, but only that this great boon, this great assistance, has not come to his notice. No wonder in that. For Porphyry was active at a time when the universal way for the liberation of the soul, which is simply the Christian religion, was by divine permission, under attack from the demon-worshippers and the kings of the earth... He did not realise that this persecution that so influenced him, and which he was afraid of suffering if he chose that way, in fact tended to strengthen Christianity and to commend it more forcefully."³⁷

PART 2

The second part is made up of the remaining twelve chapters and concerns what Augustine describes as the two cities: the city of God and the city of this world.

"I shall put forward what I think ought to be said about the two cities, which are as I have pointed out, intermixed with one another in this present world; and I shall treat of their origin, their development and their destined ends."³⁸

³⁵ *ibid.*p303

³⁶ *ibid.*p359

³⁷ *ibid.*p421-2

³⁸ *ibid.*p426

The first four books deal with foundational issues for Augustine and provide the philosophical context for what he describes as the two cities.

In **Book 11** he introduces an inherent contradiction that continues in **Book 12**, and is discernible throughout these four books. He contends both that the creation is good, but that mortality is bad, not just because of our sinfulness as humans, but as a defect in our being.

“The statement, ‘God saw that it was good’ makes it plain that God did not create under stress of any compulsion, or because he lacked something for his own needs; his only motive was goodness; he created because his creation was good. And the assertion of the goodness of the created work follows the act of creation in order to emphasise that the work corresponded with the goodness which was the reason for its creation.”³⁹

“For man is rightly understood – or, if this passes understanding is believed – to be ‘made in the image of God’. And his nearness to God who is above him is certainly found in that part of man in which he rises superior to the lower parts of his nature which he shares with the brute creation.”⁴⁰

He maintains that we were created not out of God’s own life and being, but out of nothing. Giving the example of two individuals tempted to sin, the one who yields and the other who resists, he concludes:

“And so if anyone asserts that the man himself caused the evil choice, though before that evil choice he was undoubtedly good, he must go on to ask why he caused it. Was it because he is a natural being, or because his natural being is created from nothing? It will then be found that the evil choice takes its origin not from the fact that man is a natural being, but from the fact that his natural being is created from nothing.”⁴¹

This has serious implications which have sub-Christian, Neoplatonic overtones to which we will return.

Book 13 concerns questions of the soul, sin, death the resurrection and the afterlife. Augustine shapes and works with these biblical concepts in the context of Neoplatonism, typically with as strong defence of Plato as the subject allows. For example, on the question of whether death, viewed as the soul’s separation from the body, can be a punishment, he considers the scorn that the Christian view induces from Neoplatonists who regard this separation as a source of bliss, and the binding together as the punishment. His method once again, is to show that Plato is on his side, even though it is with recourse to the latter’s belief in the gods and of their being immortal yet having mortal bodies. Quoting Plato’s own account of the supreme God promising not to allow death to dissolve their body and soul make up, he continues:

“Plato says both that the deities are mortal because of the linking of body and soul, and yet immortal by reason of the will and design of God, who made them.

Now if it is a punishment for the soul to be bound to any sort of body, why is it that God addresses the gods as though they were worried by the fear that they might die, that is be severed from the body?”⁴²

As is true particularly of in these philosophical chapters in particular, Augustine’s whole sense and style is of developing the argument while writing, the literary equivalent of thinking on ones feet, which explains the laborious and capacious style of his work.

³⁹ *ibid.*p457-458

⁴⁰ *ibid.*p430

⁴¹ *ibid.*p479

⁴² 525-6

Book 14 deals with the nature of sin. Here he continues to establish the concepts in the Neoplatonic and Manichean context of his developing thinking.

Here we encounter Augustine's understanding of human sexuality, which we will come back to. In line with the Manichean understanding of the physical body and in particular the lower half, he regards sexual passion as inseparable from lust. He is full of apology for arousing shame and embarrassment in the reader by writing about such things.

In the next four books, **Books 15 – 18**, Augustine traces the development of the two cities throughout history. In so doing he attempts, helpfully, to interface biblical history with the rest of history, although he does so in order to distinguish, not integrate, the two cities.

"I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I also call these two classes two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil."⁴³

He distinguishes the line of Cain and the line of Able as the beginning of the history of the two cities he is describing, and traces them in **Book 15** through the biblical genealogies to the flood.

Chapter 16 takes us from Noah to Judah. Augustine discusses Nimrod and Babylon and the confusion of tongues at Babel.

His overall argument continues that there have been these two streams of men since the beginning through Seth from before the flood and Shem after it. The concept is one of election rather than salvation and so his attitude is more aloof than compassionate towards the city of this world and the rest of humanity who find themselves located there.

He describes three outstanding Gentile empires at the time of Abraham: Sicyon, Egypt and Assyria, of which the latter was by far the largest. He describes them as places where

"The society of the earthborn, that is the society of men who live by man's standards, achieved a notable predominance under the sway of the apostate angels."⁴⁴

"This was about 1200 years before the foundation of Rome, the second Babylonia, as it were, the Babylon of the West."⁴⁵

In **Book 17** Augustine traces the two cities in the era of the prophets. In this section of his work Augustine is heavily dependent on the allegorical and typological use of scripture. (As when in the previous Book he used the nakedness of Noah as a type of Christ's crucifixion.) There is no essential problem with this. The practical difficulty lies in its dependency on the conceptual and philosophical loading of the personal and contemporary world-views. This is often implicit and covert, but not so much in Augustine's case because he consciously exposes the conceptual and ontological basis of his thought in the first four chapters that introduce this second part of the *City of God* as we have seen.

Now he refers to 3 meanings of Jerusalem, the earthly Jerusalem, the Heavenly City and sometimes both at once, but not the church on earth and not cities in general.

He begins **Book 18** with a brief overview of the succeeding 17 books before beginning a history of the city of this world parallel to the City of God. He sees this unequivocally as a relationship of opposition.

⁴³ *ibid.*p595

⁴⁴ *ibid.*p.676

⁴⁵ *ibid.*p677

“I promised that (given God’s help) I would first refute the enemies of the City of God, who honour their own gods above Christ, the founder of that City, and display a bitter hatred of the Christians, with a rancour most ruinous to themselves. This task I achieved in my first ten books... In the four books following my tenth I gave a summary of the origin of both these cities. Then in one book, the fifteenth of this work, I sketched their progress from the first man down to the Flood. After that the two cities proceeded on their own course in our narrative, just as they did in history, down to the time of Abraham”⁴⁶

He describes the history of the city of this world and its ‘many empires’ as really being the history of two over-riding and comparable ones, Assyria and Rome. He then parallels the advent of Abraham with the rise of Assyria and the positioning of the prophets with the rise of Rome.

“It was obviously designed that, just as in the first period of the Assyrian Empire, Abraham made his appearance and to him were given the most explicit promises of the blessing of all nations in his descendants, so in the initial stages of the Western Babylon, during which the dominion of Christ was destined to come, in whom those promises were to be fulfilled, the lips of the prophets should be opened, those prophets who in their writings as well as by their spoken word gave testimony to this great event in the future.”⁴⁷

With this book, Augustine closes his historical overview of the two cities and brings us to his final subject matter in **Books 19-22**. These cover the ultimate good, the final judgement, the necessity of eternal conscious punishment and a discussion of the eternal bliss of the City of God.

Book 19 begins with a lengthy discussion of Ultimate good and Ultimate Evil, based on Marcus Varro’s *On Philosophy*. Varro is concerned to evaluate those things that cause man the most happiness, not selfishly, but also with a view to the happiness of one’s neighbour, ones family and friends, or indeed the whole human race. Augustine eventually dismisses the whole discussion with the statement:

“But what does it matter to us? For we ought to form our judgement on the actual facts of the case, instead of attaching importance to knowing what any particular individual thought about them. If, therefore, we are asked what reply the City of God gives when asked these points, and first what view it holds about the Ultimate Good and the Ultimate Evil, the reply will be that eternal life is the Supreme Good, and eternal death the Supreme Evil, and that to achieve the one and escape the other we must live rightly.”⁴⁸

Augustine argues that there can be no real commonwealth and no real justice in the city of this world. Citing Scipio in Cicero’s *On the Republic* who described the ‘weal of the people’ as a multitude ‘in association by a common sense of right and a community of interest’ he declares that no such thing can exist.⁴⁹

In the same way that he sees the ultimate value of the City of God being otherworldly, he sees the real reason for embracing it as being escape from eternal damnation, not the missing of a blessing that will bring transformation and a new heaven and a new earth.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *ibid.*p762

⁴⁷ *ibid.*p794

⁴⁸ *ibid.*p851-2

⁴⁹ *cf.*pp881-2

⁵⁰ *cf.*pp894

In **Book 20** he deals with the question of the escape from this eternal damnation and suggests that only those from the city of this world will be at the last judgement, as those in the City of God will be spared it. He informs us rather scarily:

“No human being acts rightly unless he is supported by divine help, and no demon or man acts wickedly unless he is permitted by the same divine and completely just judgement.”⁵¹

Book 21 is all about the necessity and intellectual acceptability of eternal conscious punishment for the citizens of the city of this world and the whole work concludes in **Book 22** with a discussion of the eternal bliss of the City of God. He does this by arguing against those who say it's impossible, and then pointing to its future quality by listing the incredible gifts and blessings of this world and inferring how much better it will be.

At this point Augustine's argument brings us to confront the demands for critical answers and resolutions to the questions that the whole work raises.

These include not least the weakness of basing the possibility of eternal bliss on the temporal, mortal, properties of 'incredible gifts and blessings' already devalued by Augustine as products of nothing, base and bestial animal instincts, and the like.

We concluded our discussion of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* with the observation that his tacit acceptance of the Neoplatonic worldview effectively disassociated the material world from the spiritual world. This denied him the insight to critique the political sphere, particularly the hierarchical structure, the military domination and the economic oppression of the Roman Imperial rule. We began the discussion with the assertion that his lack of any kind of critique was rooted in the over-realised eschatology which caused him to embrace Constantine and his rule as the promised Eschaton at least to a considerable degree. Augustine on the other hand, as I shall to demonstrate in the rest of this paper, failed to understand and manifest the scope and position of the kingdom of God in the material world precisely because of his under-realised eschatology. He had no expectation of the Eschaton emerging in the material world at all.

At this point I wish to introduce the suggestion that these extremes of eschatology are the only possible ways of relating the kingdom of God to the material, political world within a Platonic or Neoplatonic world-view. Either we need a spiritual Eschaton that has arrived so completely that we can identify it with the current material political rule, or we need a wholly spiritualised Eschaton that is separated in its essential being from the material, political sphere and can only be spiritually attained. Eusebius and Augustine portray these two positions respectively.

If, as I have suggested, Eusebius was inclined to the over-realised position because of both his and the Roman church's experience of persecution under Diocletian and Licinius, and if Constantine had been such a saviour to them, why was Augustine inclined to the opposite position?

I will attempt to show that his work reveals at least three main strands of thought that provide an answer to this question.

But first I will demonstrate the failure of his under-realised eschatology to take the material world and the Roman Empire seriously and serve it with the power and values of the kingdom of God. Second I will show that by it he reduces the church to

⁵¹ *ibid.* p896

a politically effete community, parasitic on both creation and society, on a self-righteous journey to an immaterial world of their own.

As we have seen, in the first part of the *City of God* Augustine's critique is focused on the idolatry of pre-Christian Rome. Yet at least that polytheism, for all its apparent depravity, interfaced with the past and present history and daily life in society. There were gods for everything! Yet apparently for Augustine human existence is just a passing mist and the true value is only in the Heavenly City yet to come. In Book 6 he criticizes Varro's account of the ancient gods.

"Varro himself begins his enumeration of the gods with the moment of a man's conception and starts with Janus. Then he traces the sequence up to the moment of the death of a decrepit old man... He then passes to a record of the gods who are concerned, not with man himself, but with the necessities of man's life, food, clothing and the rest... Yet in the whole of this careful examination he never mentions or names any gods from whom eternal life is to be asked; and it is, strictly speaking, for the sake of eternal life alone that we are Christians."⁵²

It is one thing for Paul to say 'if for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all men most miserable'⁵³, but quite another to interpret eternal life *only* in future terms. Where is the gospel of the kingdom in which God embraces the creation? Where is a realization that the creation itself has been carried by resurrection into the Godhead forever? That in securing the future of the creation it is made progressively redeemable in the present?

In Book 5 Augustine attempts to answer the question of why God allowed the Roman Empire to endure so powerfully and for so long.

"The kingdoms of the East had enjoyed renown for a long time, when God decided that a Western Empire should arise, later in time, but more renowned for the extent and grandeur of its dominion. And, to suppress the grievous evils of many nations, he entrusted this dominion to those men, in preference to all others, who served their country for the sake of honour, praise and glory, who looked to find that glory in their country's safety above their own and who suppressed greed for money and many other faults in favour of that one fault of theirs, the love of praise."⁵⁴

Augustine uses the intriguing argument that the Romans who loved the praise of men, but subjugated greater sins with it, come into the category of those that Jesus described 'who have their reward' in distinction from the heavenly reward. This is a serious misapplication of scripture. For it creates an arena in which we cannot apply spiritual values to those who 'have their reward'.

"To such men as these God was not going to give eternal life with his angels in his own Heavenly City, the City to which true religion leads, which renders the supreme worship (the Greek word for it is *latrea*) only to the one true God. If God had not granted to them the earthly glory of an empire that surpassed all others, they would have received no reward for the good qualities, the virtues, that is, by means of which they laboured to attain that great glory. When such men do anything good, their sole motive is the hope of receiving glory from their fellow men: and the Lord refers to them when he says, 'I tell you in truth, they have received their reward in full'. They took no account of their own material interests compared with the common good, that is the commonwealth and the public purse; they resisted the temptation of avarice; they acted for their country's well-being with disinterested concern; they were guilty of no offence against the law; they succumbed to no sensual indulgence. By such

⁵² *ibid.*p247

⁵³ 1Cor15:19

⁵⁴ *ibid.*p202

immaculate conduct they laboured towards honours, power and glory, by what they took to be the true way. And they were honoured in almost all nations; they imposed their laws on many peoples; and today they enjoy renown in the history and literature of nearly all races. They have no reason to complain of the justice of God, the supreme and true. 'They have received their reward in full'."⁵⁵

But this statement by Jesus was not meant as an affirmation of those who have more or less unjust earthly empires. All spheres are subject to the eternal values of the kingdom of God. So this was irony from Jesus. He is saying that all they have is the sham of outward show rather than the answered prayer of a kingdom of justice and peace manifested in the here and now as well as in the future. Men's praise rather than the alleviation of poverty through giving and the shift of demonic strongholds in society through fasting. Jesus' is affirming the present world as the territory for his kingdom as well as the future. To allow some second class value to an unjust society whose highest value is based on the praise of men is to dishonour Rome and its people, and thereby, potentially, all human society.

In Book 4 he dispenses with the Hebrew world-view with its this-worldly practical holiness and its underlying concept of a servant people called to be a house of prayer and a blessing to all the families of the earth:

"The reason why God gives worldly dominions both to the good and the evil is this: to prevent any of his worshippers who are still infants in respect of moral progress from yearning for such gifts from him as if they were of any importance.

This is the sacrament, the hidden meaning, of the Old Testament, where the New Testament lay concealed. In the Old Testament the promises and gifts are of earthly things: but even then men of spiritual perception realised, although they did not yet proclaim the fact for all to hear, that by those temporal goods eternity was signified; they understood also what were the gifts of God which constituted true felicity."⁵⁶

In Book 5 Augustine's states his position again:

"The Jews put Christ to death, when the New testament revealed what was veiled in the Old Testament, the knowledge that God, the one true God, is to be worshipped for the sake of eternal life and everlasting gifts and for participation in that City on high, and not for earthly and temporal blessings, which divine providence bestows on good and evil without discrimination. And for this the Jews were justly given over to the Romans, for the greater glory of Rome, so that those who had sought earthly glory and attained it by their virtue (of whatever kind), overcame those who in their perverse wickedness spurned and put to death the giver of true glory and citizenship in the Eternal City."⁵⁷

We have to conclude from the *City of God* that Augustine has little moral sense of the values of the kingdom of God. For him it's all about being with angels and the participation in non-specific blessings and gifts in a future and otherworldly kingdom.

This is so serious that we must now examine the three strands of thought that give the clue to his rejection of the material world and his reduction of the kingdom of God to such a partial and ephemeral aspect.

The first of these is **His doctrine of God, in particular the immutability and inscrutability of his being.** I will attempt to show that this is an unnecessary and unbiblical approach to the being of God that leads to an unbridgeable alienation

⁵⁵ *ibid.* pp204-205

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p177

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p211-212

between God and man in direct contradiction with creation, incarnation and redemption. According to Augustine the doctrine of immutability is rooted in the concept that God cannot change. So the creation of the world cannot have altered him in any way. If we were created out of God's being, then some of God would have passed to us and God would be changed. Therefore God must have created us out of nothing. However this means we are forever alienated from God unless we can be saved not only from our sin but also from our mortality which is rooted in our nothingness of being. Jesus came to save us not only from our sin but our inadequacy of being. This is the root understanding of original sin in Augustine, a kind of pre-sinful defect in being.

"For man is rightly understood – or, if this passes understanding is believed – to be 'made in the image of God'. And his nearness to God who is above him is certainly found in that part of man in which he rises superior to the lower parts of his nature which he shares with the brute creation."⁵⁸

"The things that he made are good because they were made by him; but they are subject to change, because they were made not out of his being but out of nothing."⁵⁹

"For man's nature was created good by God who is good; but it was made changeable by him who was changeless, since it was created from nothing. And so the will in that nature can turn away from good to evil."⁶⁰

So it follows that Adam and Eve sinned because they were created from nothing, and were mutable, not because they, in the image of God had choice. An immutable God is incapable of relationship, of creating in his own image, of incarnation, of empathy, of intercession and of vicarious suffering. He would just be a superior, other, holier-than-thou deity unworthy of worship and incapable of true love, unlike the God described by the writer to the Hebrews:

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin."⁶¹

John's gospel literally translated says

"Without him was not anything made that was made and that which was made was life in him."⁶²

It is Augustine's fixation with God's supposed immutability that makes it impossible for his *City of God* to impinge upon earthly cities and change the world. He adopts a position that must be wrong because it vitiates the incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection that eternally changed the Godhead by elevating a material human being into the heart of the Trinity. The doctrine exists in partnership with the doctrine of inscrutability, which defends the otherwise obvious injustice and inadequacy of the concept and others like it. He introduces it in Book 12 alongside God's foreknowledge to give a philosophical basis for the existence of the City of God and the city of this world as two intentional streams within the creation.

"In this first-created man we find something like the beginning, in the human race, of the two cities: their beginnings, that is in the foreknowledge of God, though not observable in fact. For from that man were to come all men, some of them to join the company of the evil angels in their punishment, others to be admitted to the company of the good angels in their reward. This was God's decision, however inscrutable to

⁵⁸ [ibid.p430](#)

⁵⁹ [ibid.p472](#)

⁶⁰ [ibid.p635](#)

⁶¹ [Heb4:15](#)

⁶² [Jn1:3-4](#)

us. For Scripture says, ‘All the Lord’s ways are mercy and truth,’ and his grace cannot be unjust; nor can his justice be unkind.”⁶³

The second stream that denies the kingdom of God access to the material world in the *City of God* is Augustine’s understanding of **the subordinate status of the material world**. We have already noted the impact of Neoplatonism on both Eusebius and Augustine and obviously the lowly status of the material world is explicit in the Platonic hierarchy of being. However some of his pronouncements on the material world seem to move beyond the effects of a Neoplatonist influenced world-view to a level of judgement and invective that betrays a moral position. I will suggest that this is evidence that his ten years in Manicheism had a lasting, possibly subconscious impact on him. In his view

“All men, as long as they are mortals, must needs be wretched.”⁶⁴

Seeming to struggle to state without doubt or apology that God created humankind in his image he admits that

“His nearness to God who is above him is certainly found in that part of man in which he rises superior to the lower parts of his nature which he shares with the brute creation.”⁶⁵

“God was well aware that man would sin and so, becoming liable to death, would then produce a progeny destined to die. He knew also that mortals would reach such a pitch of boundless iniquity, that brute beasts, deprived of rational will, would live in greater security and peace among their own kind - although their teeming multitudes took their origin from the waters and the earth - than men.”⁶⁶

This is so different from the theology of Paul, who while he quotes the Psalmist who declares that ‘no one does good, no not one’, and ‘their throat is an open grave’⁶⁷ continues to declare that the creation is travailing, waiting for the sons of God to be seen. In the same book he makes clear that the power of Christ’s resurrection gives life to our mortal bodies now, not just in the heavenly future.

Nowhere does this tendency in Augustine become clearer than in his view of human sexuality. It is clear from the *City of God* that he regarded human sexual intercourse as essentially impure. Given that we all come into the world this way, this dysfunctional view carries with it the implicit assumption that we all are essentially impure. Book 14 deals with Augustine’s understanding of human sexuality. He expresses a distinctly Manichean understanding of the lower half of the physical body, making clear that he regards sexual passion as inseparable from lust. Struggling to imagine, how sexual intercourse, even reserved only for the purposes of procreation, could have taken place in the pre-fall state of Eden he suggests:

“Without feeling the allurements of passion goading him on, the husband would have relaxed on his wife’s bosom in tranquillity of mind and with no impairment of the body’s integrity. Moreover, although we cannot prove this in experience, it does not therefore follow that we should not believe that when those parts of the body were not activated by the turbulent heat of passion but brought into service by deliberate use of power when the need arose, the male seed could have been dispatched into the womb, with no loss of the wife’s integrity, just as the menstrual flux can now be produced

⁶³ *ibid.*p508-509

⁶⁴ *ibid.*p359

⁶⁵ *ibid.*p430

⁶⁶ *ibid.*p503

⁶⁷ Rom3:12-13

from the womb of a virgin without loss of maidenhead. For the seed could be injected through the same passage by which the flux is ejected... So the two sexes might have been united for impregnation and by conception by an act of will, instead of by a lustful craving.”⁶⁸

Significantly, Augustine links the guilt he associates with intercourse with the very nature of the generation of the human race and as he makes clear above, not just with the fall.

“There is in human conscience a certain mysterious and inherent sense of decency, which is natural and also admirable, which ensures that if kinship gives a woman a claim to honour and respect, she is shielded from the lust (and lust it is, although it results in procreation) which, as we know, brings blushes even to the chastity of marriage.

Now the intercourse of male and female is the seedbed, as it were, of a city, as far as the race of mortals is concerned. But the earthly city needs only generation, whereas the Heavenly City needs regeneration also, to escape the guilt connected with generation.”⁶⁹

It is a matter of debate whether his profound unease about sexual passion predisposed him to devalue the physical world or whether it was a symptom of it. Similarly, was this his reason for disconnecting God from the creation by insisting that he made it from nothing, and not from his own life? It is much more likely that it was precisely because God was so passionate about the creation and especially about the creation of human beings in their image that procreation was made so passionate and pleasurable. What is for sure is that the Scriptures carry none of the awkwardness and disgust about human sexuality that Augustine manifests despite the acknowledged shame and covering of the fall that he cites.

If he was partly using his Christianity to escape from his failure to come to terms with his own sexuality, which his own history could be taken to indicate, then it is hardly surprising that he failed to develop a sufficiently holistic understanding of the gospel.

I suggest that sexuality is such an essential part of our being that failure to recognise it as essentially good and to apply salvation to that area of life impacts our world view and our critical judgement. As a result we are unable to embrace the fullness of creation, including human culture and society which is the proper domain of the kingdom of God.

I am aware that I have focused on the failures of two great and highly regarded Fathers of the Christian Movement. They were undoubtedly men of courage and commitment trying to respond with integrity to the issues of their time. However, their failure to understand and relate the kingdom of God to the foundational structures of the empire and life of their day left those who followed them with an inadequate understanding of central issues of the gospel and misplaced conclusions which are still with us today. The best way to honour them is to be unrelenting towards the offending aspects of their works.

ROGER MITCHELL
JANUARY 10TH 2006

⁶⁸ *ibid.*p591

⁶⁹ *ibid.*p625