INTRODUCTION

For his audiences from the later medieval period through the mid-sixteenth century, the Church Father and theologian, Augustine (354–430), could be both ubiquitous and elusive, doctrinal and poetic, distantly authoritative and intimately familiar. This study of him introduces only several aspects of his intellectual and artistic legacy from the fourteenth through the mid-sixteenth century. Augustine's influence can be measured across a variety of verbal and visual media – not only in the verses of Petrarch nor in painted evocations of the saint but in the interstices of poetry and aesthetics, of theology and philosophy, of religious polemic and humanistic oratory. Augustine's written record inspired in many of his readers a sense of creative possibility: of theology as poetic, of art as morally instructive, and of love of the divine as indebted as much to the earthly senses as it is legitimated by the ineffable.

I have traced these intersections with a mind for complexity, yet also with a sense of the potential for continuities in the image of the saint. Such continuities contribute to our picture of the period's self-understanding. A collection of themes begins to illuminate certain preoccupations in early modern culture, and they cross modern disciplinary boundaries as they also shed light on them. They include the nature of subjectivity, the importance of the hierarchy of bodily senses, the fabric of the angelic and of the soul, of light as metaphor, and of the purifying benefits of solitude in nature. These are subjects that were treated alike by poets, artists, theologians, and humanists.

Augustine's image, his influence and legacy, cannot be encapsulated in any one instance. Moreover, I am treating a figure who bears only a very remote relation to the late antique individual whom so many scholars over several generations have brought to life. I am thinking of such lights as Etienne Gilson, Henri-Irénée Marrou, and Pierre Paul and Jeanne Courcelle, for example, as well as of Peter Brown, R. A. Markus, and James J. O'Donnell. If Augustine made a name for himself through his "self-creation" in texts, he also did not live in the world that he created.[1] He became, after his death, very much a creature of the imagination. His brilliant writings, not to mention the all-important apocrypha, often invite

a deeply felt response from his reader, and they demand, too, our readiness for contradiction and change. We find ourselves attending perhaps less to the historical circumstances of this ambitious, fifth-century bishop as to the ways his works, the very *idea* of him, can mean so many different things in different eras.

I have examined only one story among many possible stories about Augustine, focusing primarily on Italy and on Italian art. I have often had Vittore Carpaccio's mesmerizing portrait of Augustine from 1502 (Plate I) in my mind's eye. Here, the saint is interrupted in his labors by an otherworldly light that comes in at his window, a light that illuminates various carefully rendered objects that both engage and gratify the senses: astrolabes and works of sculpture in the background, instruments of measure, and musical manuscripts in the foreground. In tracing the reception and reinvention of Augustine, I argue, somewhat in opposition to received wisdom about Neoplatonism, that readers in the early modern period probably knew their Augustine even better than they knew their Plato. He was an exemplar of the scholarly life, just as Carpaccio envisaged him, and his writings came to foster a new subjectivity. According to the popular apocryphal letter on which Carpaccio's painting is based, a supernatural light and fragrance entered Augustine's study at night at the very moment that his cantankerous correspondent, Jerome, had died. "Will your eye see what the eye of no man can see?" Jerome admonished Augustine, who had been trying to probe the mysteries of celestial bliss. "By what measure will you measure the immense?"

I begin by trying to establish the availability of Augustine's prodigious body of work. The *Confessions* rose to new popularity around 1400, alongside the *City of God*, which was one of the first printed books. At the same time, the order of Augustinian Hermits and the Augustinian Canons fiercely disputed their respective claims as heirs to their "founder." This polemic gives rise not only to representations of Augustine as the scholar-humanist, but of Augustine as the reformed and secluded eremitic. The polemic between the two religious communities, the Canons and the Hermits, forged a new iconography of Augustine, beginning with his *arca* in Pavia, continuing through the lesser-known cycles at Padua and Gubbio, and reaching its apogee in Benozzo Gozzoli's remarkable fresco cycle at San Gimignano.

The poet and humanist, Petrarch, had a tiny copy of the *Confessions* in his pocket when he made his storied climb of Mont Ventoux, as described by him in a letter traditionally construed as a manifesto of early modern sensibility. I uncover an Augustinian aesthetics in Petrarch, and his conflicted celebration of the senses. It is striking that Augustine was almost wholly missing from Dante's cosmos, where he makes only a brief, somewhat official appearance. He must, however, be present in a variety of ways in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. Petrarch's indebtedness to Augustine opened up a perspective on "the open, developing spiritual life, of the mind in movement," which might be the key, as William J. Bouwsma so persuasively suggests, to Augustine's meaning for the Renaissance.[2]

In this connection, Augustine's complex theory of divine illumination bears on artistic representations of sanctity. In Platonic insights about light, Augustine alluded often to sense experience, especially to sight and sound. What distinguished belief from knowledge for him – what constituted knowledge – was "seeing," which could be both literal and metaphorical. For Renaissance theorists such as Marsilio Ficino, Augustine's theory of illumination fused with Platonic imagery and expressed itself as a definition of knowledge as a formation of the mind by God. In analyzing the phenomenon of sight in paintings of Augustine, I use his distinctions between "corporeal" and "spiritual" sight to think about how artists rose to the challenge of portraying the transcendent and ineffable through their representational practice.

Finally, I look at Augustine on time and creation: "What was God doing," he asked, "before he made heaven and earth?" Like the metaphor of light, Augustine's question as to how to conceive the "Architect of heaven and earth" had reverberations for Renaissance artists, particularly in picturing Genesis. Michelangelo represents the culmination of my story. Although we know that Petrarch was a poetic model for the artist, there is no firm evidence that he read Augustine. Yet the coincidence in their motifs, as these are powerfully articulated in Michelangelo's art and in his poetry, is worth noting. Is it enough to see these preoccupations arising simply from a mutual indebtedness to varying strains of Neoplatonism? Both Augustine and Michelangelo spoke in the form of a first-person query or lament – in Augustine's case, most accessibly in the *Confessions* – and this gives their voices an indelible force. Each saw a potentially ineradicable divide between the corporeal and the incorporeal realms, and both describe spiritual love in a language that draws its impact from earthly analogies. Each dwelt on the character of the enraptured state, on the frailties of the body, on guilt, on the identity of time, and on the eye and the act of seeing as integral to defining transforming experiences such as love. Petrarch, who applied the imagery of seeing to the practices both of the artist and of the lover, was probably a major link in this chain of associations.

The visual rendering of Genesis is the supreme challenge for an artist who is aware of metaphysical conundrums, as Michelangelo surely was. To set the scene, I briefly look at the fifteenth-century program of the Sistine Chapel before turning to the Sistine Ceiling and the altar wall. It is all too easy, perhaps, to see Augustine everywhere in the Sistine Chapel, given that the space had been a material summation of the ideals of papal primacy and exegetical canonicity since its rebuilding in the late fifteenth century. In analyzing the decoration and its Augustinian theology, I identify narrative choice and iconographic detail, while attempting to give artists, their patrons, and advisors their due.

In art-historical discourse, Sixtus IV's project and that of his uncle, Julius II (as well as the *Last Judgment*) have received many readings; these are reflections, really, of how art history has changed. In locating an Augustinian matrix in the ideation

of these works, I do not mean to exclude or disqualify other interpretations. Rather, I mean to bring different lights and colors to them, as if seen through another prism. I intend, then, to be inclusive, and in a way that perhaps Augustine himself might have appreciated. After all, the chapel had to image the Church from both a doctrinal and catholic point of view. I am indebted, however, more to some scholars than to others. Many of Edgar Wind's courageous and erudite writings on the Sistine Ceiling were published for the first time after I had begun my research. His preparedness to bring art, exegesis, and historical circumstance into a harmonious resolution has been influential to my study. Any discussion of the Augustinian content of the vault must acknowledge, further, Esther Dotson's magisterial template, and I endeavor to do this while trying not to plot too-tidy parallels between text and image. With these two interpreters, I find myself in greatest sympathy. Augustine has allowed me to hover above these extraordinary artistic creations with a different pair of eyes. An overriding thesis of mine is that his theology of the soul connects the Sistine Ceiling to the *Last Judgment* and brings us to the threshold of the Reformation, and a very different Augustine.

There stand three areas of historical investigation outside my purview, although I have at points clearly relied on them. The first of these is the Augustinian "renaissance" of the later medieval period that was largely inspired and fostered by members of the order of Hermits. I engage this topic, however, as it relates to the order's patronage in Padua in the trecento, to their scholarly inheritance at Santo Spirito, Florence, and as it constitutes part of Petrarch's cultural formation. This medieval flowering of Augustine encompassed the "Via Gregorii," which was so called after the order's medieval theologian, Gregory of Rimini (c. 1300–58). As such, this development belongs within the scholastic tradition of the medieval university, and it privileged, on the whole, one stream of Augustine's writings, his Anti-Pelagianism. The revived Via Gregorii nonetheless forms the setting for the soteriological contests of the sixteenth century in Italy, as well as in northern Europe, and it has been a crucial context for students of Luther in forming the "headwaters" of the Reformation.[3] Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, as a continuation of his argumentation about the human soul initiated on the Sistine Ceiling, must be understood in relation to this long and many-faceted trajectory.

The patristic revival in the Low Countries known as the *devotio moderna* is also less germane to my study. The Brethren of the Common Life and the motivational example of Geert Grote, as well as the distinctive history of the Augustinian Canons of the Congregation of Windesheim, comprise separate, although in some ways congenial, reform movements when compared with the concerns of the Italian Augustinians. In this way, the original Augustinianism of Erasmus is outside my scope, although there is surely more to be said about the affiliation between northern and southern European intellectuals. Finally, this is not centrally an account of the religious thought of the Italian humanists. That being said, however, such persons as Aurelio "Lippo" Brandolini, Giles of Viterbo,

and Girolamo Seripando, as well as Petrarch, Coluccio Salutati, and Marsilio Ficino, make their entrances as heirs to a tradition of Augustinian learning. The symbiosis between the values of humanism and a revivified figure of Augustine can be posited not only in humanistic writings, sermons, poetry, and in works of art, but also in their expressive content, in their style, and in their character as knowledge. My analysis belongs then, to the realm of Renaissance intellectual history, as well as to its art history, and so within the chronicle of this era's religious and humanistic cultures.

ONE:

AUGUSTINE IN THE RENAISSANCE

> At San Miniato yesterday evening we began to read a little Saint Augustine. And this at last turned into making music, leaping up and polishing a certain model of dancing practised here.[1]

The image of the holy person is a measure of ideals. The saint is a privileged focus of spiritual aspirations and imaginative creative strategies. As depicted by artists, and by humanists, patrons, and religious orders, the saint functions as an exemplar. In spiritual terms, he or she is the paradigm of otherworldliness, the privileged connection between earthly things and the mysteries of the divine. In intellectual terms, the saint is the conduit between the past and the present, the mortal life bringing with it a message of philosophical universals. More concretely, the saint can be the polemically bound embodiment of institutional strategy, the vehicle of the order that claims him or her as founder.

Augustine (354–430) is a special case. First, unlike other founders such as Dominic and Francis, his historical relationship with the Augustinians – divided in the Renaissance between the Canons Regular and the mendicants, the Hermits – has to be, and was, a matter approaching invention. Augustine died in Africa in 430. In the eleventh century, the Canons adopted his Rule, which was only partly attributable to the saint, whereas the Hermits formally coalesced as an order under the same Rule much later with the Great Union of 1256, which joined together all eremitical Augustinian groups.[2] The distance between the historical Augustine and the Augustinians themselves – it is appropriate to ask whether Augustine was, in fact, in any way "Augustinian" – places the issue of his identity, and the very mechanisms that manufactured that identity, under a very particular kind of pressure. In the decade preceding the Great Union, Innocent IV, in his bull *Incumbit Nobis* (16 December 1243), addressed "all the hermits living in Tuscany, except for the brothers of Saint William." This bull laid out for aspiring Augustinian Hermits the criteria by which they could be said to constitute a new order, including adopting Augustine's Rule and formulating

observances that conformed to it. The pope's prescriptions were received among the brothers

> with much greater interest and a much greater sense or urgency than in any other order. The reason for this is that the Augustinian Order had for its founder not a physical, but a moral, juridical, or mystical person. The Augustinians began to focus on Saint Augustine all the enthusiasm, devotion, veneration, imitation, and doctrinal discipleship which the members of other orders directed to their immediate founder, thus almost instinctively distancing themselves from Saint Augustine.[3]

Such a passionate and yet historically remote relationship with their founder endows his image, in both written evocations and in works of art, with the unique and persuasive force of an ideal.

Second, unlike other founders of orders, Augustine bequeathed an enormous written legacy. The simple fact that he wrote lent him an unusual prestige in the Renaissance. Any representation of him, whether written or visual, demands at least two steps backward: first, his image has to be perceived as the result of a historical refashioning long after the fact. Second, the image of this saint has available as its constituents the words of its subject: the verbal self-portrait of his spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions*, and his polemical and philosophical writings. Many of these express one of the early dilemmas of his thought: what to do with the idea and experience of beauty?

This study began with a question about the extent to which Augustine's aesthetic ideas carried over into the Renaissance. Were the Augustinians the major custodians of this legacy? Could we speak, furthermore, of an Augustinian theory of art and architecture? These questions led beyond the painted image of the saint, which is a focus of this study, to the challenging questions of intellectual filiation and influence. These two are, though, uniquely intertwined. Inasmuch as art constituted learning for the religious orders, which is an inalienable assumption of mine, then any Augustinian theory of art must partake of the problem of "making visible" and of the related problems of defining "sight" and "image," "truth" and "imitation."[4] These were, for the Renaissance as for late antiquity, deeply ethical and religious concerns as much as they were artistic ones. Augustine's own inclinations in the realm of the aesthetic led him toward the figurative rather than the allegorical, or at least led him to attempt to make these distinctions.[5]

Instead of one Augustine, there were many. His status as a leading Church Father and theologian, as well as his popular identity, derived from numerous late quattrocento editions in the *volgare* of the *Confessions*. He was ubiquitous.[6] Renaissance readers encountered him long before they knew Plato. It was Augustine's statement in the *Confessions* that Plato's doctrine was close to Christian

truths that came to be cited by humanists in their own philosophical self-defense.[7] The fourteenth-century poet and humanist, Petrarch, called Plato "the prince of philosophy," acknowledging that he

> is praised by the greater men, Aristotle by the bigger crowd. . . . In divine matters Plato and the Platonists rose higher, though none of them could reach the goal he aimed at. But, as I have said, Plato came nearer to it. No Christian and particularly no faithful reader of Augustine's books will hesitate to confirm this, nor do the Greeks deny it, however ignorant of letters they are in our time; in the footsteps of their forebears they call Plato "divine" and Aristotle "demonious."[8]

Later in the same work, Petrarch says that he believes "a pious reader will agree with him [Augustine] no less than with Aristotle or Plato" and that the saint "does not in the least doubt that he [Plato] would have become a Christian if he had come to life again in Augustine's time or had foreseen the future while he lived." As Petrarch adds approvingly, Augustine had counted himself among the Platonists.[9] The matter of Augustine's own Neoplatonism is vital to an evaluation not only of his presence in intellectual circles but of Neoplatonism in the Renaissance in general. Augustine kept Platonism alive, we might say, ushering it in by the back door, wearing a monk's habit. In the case of the *Confessions*, he spoke a special interior language of the heart.

Ever since Paul Oskar Kristeller's searching essay on Augustine and the early Renaissance, there has been no single study of the saint in the early modern era.[10] Kristeller himself lamented that there was no "adequate comprehensive study" of Augustine's influence in the period. As he noted, the saint's influence in the West has been enormous, even immeasurable, and changing, too, while his thought, in its very nature, is extraordinarily complex and wide ranging. He was, first of all, the embodiment of Church doctrine in the medieval Latin West. Yet although he used the Greek text of the Bible and read Greek works in Latin translation, Augustine was really a latecomer to the language and an imperfect master of it. His theology was both independent of the Greek tradition and markedly original. He was largely responsible, and in a way that had far-reaching consequences, for reducing curiosity about the Greek Fathers.[11]

The possible ways in which Augustine contributed to Renaissance culture – whether through his writings, the representations of apocrypha, or the order's various appropriations of him – would each require independent studies to approach anything like a complete portrayal of his "place" in the Renaissance. Petrarch ushered in the era conventionally implied by the term "Renaissance," and Luther sounded its end: two men who defined a new age and its waning, both with enduring ties to the Hermits, as their intellectual son and as a reformist Observant, respectively.

The Renaissance reception of Augustine grew out of long-standing historical perspectives shared by medieval authors. An unlikely but tenacious tradition held that Jacobus de Voragine, the thirteenth-century compiler of the *Legenda aurea*, knew all of Augustine's writings by heart.[12] Given Voragine's immeasurable role in ideating the iconography of the saints, this is noteworthy in itself. Since the fourteenth century and perhaps even earlier, Voragine had been credited with a volume dedicated to his favorite theologian, his *Tractatus de libris a Beato Augustino editis*.[13] Given the multitude of editions of the *Legenda aurea* available after the 1450s, in both Latin and a number of European languages, Voragine's portrait of Augustine provides an essential primer, tinted in its own way, on which to compose the designs and colors of the saint's Renaissance identity.[14]

In his partial recounting of the only ancient biography of Augustine, Possidius's *Vita* from the 430s, Voragine delineates a life directed both by certainty and by renunciation. He illustrates his life with the saint's written testimony and, at the end, makes its trajectory indelible – typically so for Voragine – by miracles. For his readers among the religious, particularly the Augustinians, there were perhaps three important lessons to Augustine's life. Voragine takes care to emphasize the saint's education in the liberal arts such that "he was considered a supreme philosopher and most brilliant orator." This emphasis overshadows the sins, errors, and hesitations recounted in the *Confessions* that Voragine chose to underplay, except where he wished to emphasize a penitential and reformatory aspect to Augustine's appreciation of bodily sensations and worldly beauty. These sins are among those given by Voragine, and many of them are drawn from the saint's own self-accusations of gluttony, intemperance, and other sensual pleasures.[15] Second, Voragine's subject's gradual withdrawal from the world, as described in the *Confessions* and the *Soliloquies*, is essentially exaggerated, perhaps in part because Voragine's order, the Dominicans, followed Augustine's Rule so that Augustine was a special model for the religious life.[16] This is a focus that Voragine adopted elsewhere, as in his sermon on Ambrose based on *De civitate Dei* in which he dwells on the *vita contemplativa*, the *vita actuosa*, and the *vita composita*.[17] The *vita composita* became a figure for the Augustinians from the fourteenth century on. For Voragine, it is exemplified in the way that Augustine's experiences are often acted out within the view of other persons. He is witnessed as an inspired but humble leader. Third, and significant for the order's claims to its inheritance, Augustine's relics literally spoke to their custodians, dictating that the saint's example be institutionalized and ordering that religious foundations commemorate every station of their rest on the way from Sardinia to Pavia. Liutprand, king of the Lombards, sponsored this journey, and he became a patron of architecture, setting a trend for partnership between secular and religious entities that was to characterize the order's rise to prominence in the early modern period. Voragine himself cast his lives within a Lombard framework – as "Lombardic History" – and concluded them with a "history" of the Lombards. He thus implicitly asserted

a link between Augustinian foundations and Lombard culture that would become more evident in the fifteenth century.[18]

In the fourteenth century, in answer to doctrinal critiques from the other orders, the Augustinians were led to analyze – to gloss – with acuity and insight the patristic bases of their founding.[19] Outstanding among these enterprises was Bartolomeo da Urbino's (d. 1350) *Milleloquium veritatis S. Augustini* (1345), (in addition to his *Milleloquium S. Ambrosii*), which is a concordance of Augustine comprising around fifteen thousand extracts organized in alphabetical order under subject (e.g., *fides*, *haeresis*, *iustitia*). Bartolomeo included a catalogue of the saint's theological texts, letters, and sermons and short summaries of each with their *incipit* and *explicit*. Not all the excerpts were authentically Augustine's, but this gargantuan compilation offers both a measure of the Augustine known to the later Middle Ages and, since it was arranged according to alphabetical subject headings from "Abel" to "Zizania," an index to contemporary categories of knowledge.[20] Petrarch alluded to the *Milleloquium* when he reflected in a letter to the Avignon pope Clement VI on his age's greedy obsession with lists.[21] Clement bestowed the bishopric of Urbino on Bartolomeo in 1347, perhaps on the strength of his *De Romani Pontificis Christi Vicarii Auctoritate*. He was sure to have been an admirer of the *Milleloquium*, which was dedicated to him and which was the better-known accomplishment.

The work was popular, surviving in more than fifty manuscripts. From 1555 until 1734, it was produced in a series of five or six printings.[22] Bartolomeo may have discovered Augustine's *De musica*, which the great humanist and chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), was still looking for in 1396.[23] Bartolomeo made possible a coherent and guided engagement with Augustine's thinking, although not with his autobiography or his theological values.[24] From the perspective of a preacher, an impatient scholar, a curious reader, and a patron or artist, the *Milleloquium* was an inestimable resource in shaping an Augustinian "way" and in designing the Augustinian subject in art. In 1426, the Visconti of Pavia owned an illuminated manuscript copy.[25] The young Petrarch was a friend of Bartolomeo's. They had probably met in Bologna around 1321 when the friar began teaching there. Two years later, Petrarch entered Bologna's law school. Bartolomeo's friend, the great canonist and devotee of Jerome, Giovanni d'Andrea, may also have taught Petrarch in Bologna. In 1347, shortly after Bartolomeo had become bishop of Urbino, and in answer to his request for some poetry to add to the collection, Petrarch complied, composing several verses. In a wonderful example of the dialogue among the disciplines, these are only preserved in the *Milleloquium*.[26]

There is here also a creative cross-fertilization of another kind. Giovanni d'Andrea fondly termed the work his "Augustinianus" as a counterpart to his own, earlier *Hieronymianus*. Both anthologies were assembled in Bologna at about the same time. This affectionate semi-personification of the collections seems