

Introduction

THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

With an intriguing turn of phrase, Nicholas of Cusa (AD 1401–1464) once wrote, “Therefore, the world machine will have, as it were, its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere, for its circumference and center is God, who is everywhere and nowhere.”¹ Something similar could almost be said about the resurrection in the works of Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430).

In the entire collection of Augustine’s works – his dialogues, treatises, letters, sermons, scriptural commentaries, questions and answers, and public debates – the circumference of the resurrection is almost nowhere. A circumscribed treatment of it almost does not exist. A reader searches only in vain for a single bounded volume on the resurrection in the library of Augustine. “Augustine never wrote a treatise on the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” as Gerald O’Collins notes,² not to mention an extant one on the resurrection of humanity. Except for a handful of sermons, Augustine never devoted a circumscribed discussion entirely and exclusively to the resurrection.³

While its circumference is almost nowhere in Augustine’s works, however, the center of the resurrection is almost everywhere. Once his discussions of the resurrection emerge, they reveal the fact that, and the degree to which, the event and mystery of the resurrection

¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* 2.12.162 (ed. Ernest Hoffman and Raymond Klibansky, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 [Leipzig: Felicitas Meiner, 1932], p. 103, l. 21–p. 104, l. 3; *On Learned Ignorance*, in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997], p. 161).

² Gerald O’Collins, *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 1.

³ See Possidius, *Indiculus* (PL 46, col. 6, ll. 7–8; WSA I/2, p. 171): “*Sermm. 240, 241, etc. uel 361, 362. – De Resurrectione, tractatus duo*” (“Two sermons on the resurrection”).

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is at the center and heart of Augustine's theological project. This is not to say, of course, that Augustine always and everywhere focuses explicitly on the resurrection; or even that he displays, or has in mind, how the resurrection might impact or connect with certain other theological, exegetical, or pastoral matters to which, instead, he is presently attending. Rather, the ubiquitous centrality of the resurrection in Augustine's theology goes much deeper, even to the point of being radical. While his treatments of it certainly break ground and land on many of the pages of his many works, some of these explicit statements indicate that the resurrection also stands beneath the surface of his entire Christian thought and practice. For Augustine, the entirety of his theological life and work emerges from, and is sustained by, the life-giving root of the resurrection. In fact, according to him, the paramount resurrection of Jesus is what permits and enables the project of Christian theology to be undertaken in the first place. As Augustine grows to appreciate and learns to articulate, the resurrection is what structures the life of Christ and the life of Christians.

Augustine makes several statements to confirm this point. For instance, with respect to the life of Christ, he preaches that Jesus's resurrection constitutes the focal target of the entire Christ event:

Indeed, that God from God, God without any time, was born human from human at a certain time, therefore, that he was born in mortal flesh, in the likeness of the sin of flesh (see Rom 8:3), that he endured infancy, passed through boyhood, arrived at young manhood, and continued in this until death – all of this was in service of the resurrection.⁴

Everything about Jesus Christ intends the resurrection of humanity. As Augustine comments, "And the whole preaching and dispensation through Christ is this, brethren, and is not anything else: that souls should resurrect and bodies should resurrect."⁵ Furthermore, with respect to the life of Christians, Augustine

⁴ s. 229H.1 (MA 1, p. 479, ll. 2–7; WSA III/6, p. 295).

⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 23.6 (CCL 36, p. 236, ll. 26–28; WSA III/12, p. 410).

locates its framework in the resurrection. As he preaches, “Indeed, the resurrection of the dead is our hope; the resurrection of the dead is our faith. It is also our charity [...]. Therefore, when faith in the resurrection of the dead is taken away, the whole of Christian doctrine collapses.”⁶ The centrality of the resurrection is certainly not missed by Augustine.

Acknowledging the fact of the resurrection’s centrality for Augustine, however, prompts us to investigate what kind of centrality this actually is. If Augustine makes the resurrection so structurally vital for Christian belief and practice, does this require him to evacuate it of its actual contents so that the resurrection becomes a mere skeleton, an empty signifier, for Christian faith, Christian hope, Christian charity, or even Christianity itself? In grasping its centrality, does Augustine – even unintentionally or perhaps even despite his best intentions – let go of its integrity, such that his discourses on the resurrection serve a merely rhetorical or metaphorical function? Conversely, if the resurrection furnishes everything or almost everything in Christianity, does this mean that Augustine so overloads its furniture with such a massive amount of concrete detail that it no longer can credibly bear the weight of Christian revelation? None of these hypotheticals seem to be the actual case, as this study hopes to show.

THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION

In deeply careful and considerate ways, Augustine elaborates his theology of the resurrection from his Catholic Christian faith in the resurrected flesh of Jesus and in the witness of Scripture to the resurrection. With respect to the biblical terminology for the resurrection, he acknowledges that the frequent scriptural translation of the Latin word *resurrectio* has been taken from the Greek word ἀνάστασις or ἐξανάστασις.⁷ Furthermore, quoting the Gospel of John, he provides a concise description of the structure of the resurrection when he asks,

⁶ s. 361.2 (PL 39, col. 1599, ll. 33–35, 44–46; WSA III/10, p. 225).

⁷ See *loc.* 1.19 (CCL 33, p. 383, ll. 80–87; WSA I/14, p. 488). As N. T. Wright notes, in his *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God,

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“But what else is it to resurrect (*resurgere*) than to revive, that is, to return ‘from death to life’ (Jn 5:24)?”⁸ Similarly, Augustine describes the resurrection as the return from death to life when he wonders:

In fact, how do we understand what is meant by resurrection (*resurrectio*), which we have never experienced? Is it not because we perceive what it is to live, and the deprivation of that reality we call death, and the return from this to what we perceive we call resurrection (*resurrectionem*)?⁹

In essence, Augustine understands that the resurrection, or rising again, consists in human revivification, the return of humans from death to life.¹⁰ Moreover, for Augustine, the only life that unconditionally deserves the designation life is the eternal life of happiness. Thus, he preaches:

Indeed, the only [life] that is called and understood to be life itself, without any qualification, is eternal and happy, so as it alone should be called life, in comparison with that which we lead, should be called death, rather than life. That kind is in the Gospel: “If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). Did he add eternal or happy? Likewise, when he was speaking about the resurrection of the flesh, he said, “Those who have done good [will enter] into the resurrection of life” (Jn 5:29); neither here did he say eternal or happy.¹¹

Accordingly, Augustine believes and understands that “resurrection” (*resurrectio*) – in its least qualified, yet most precise sense – means

vol. 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), on p. 8, n. 12: “The Latin *resurrectio* seems to be a Christian coinage; the earliest refer[ences] noted in [Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*] 1585 are Tert[ullian, *On the Resurrection*] 1 and Augustine, *City of God* 22.28, and then the Vulgate of the gospels.”

⁸ *trin.* 8.5.8 (CCL 50, p. 278, ll. 65–66; WSA I/5, p. 248).

⁹ *Gn. litt.* 8.16.34 (CSEL 28.1, p. 255, l. 25–p. 256, l. 3; WSA I/13, p. 366).

¹⁰ Isabelle Bochet observes, in her “Resurrectio,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 4, fasc. 7/8, ed. Robert Dodaro, Cornelius Mayer, and Christof Müller (Basel: Schwabe, 2018), cols. 1163–1176, on col. 1163, that Augustine very often uses *resurrectio* and *resurgere*, each about 2030 times, to express the act of bringing back to eternal life, in the manner of Christ.

¹¹ *en. Ps.* 118.19.4 (CCL 40, p. 1728, ll. 4–11; WSA III/19, p. 431).

nothing less than the revivification of dead humanity to the eternal life of beatitude in God. The resurrection is humanity's crowning comeback. It is our finest moment of resilience, the gracious accomplishment of which belongs to the God of the resurrection. As Augustine fleshes out the bones of this resurrection structure, he always retains an awareness of the provisional and speculative character of his rather moderate descriptions of its details. While his faith confirms the basic facts of the resurrection, his understanding explores its finer points with a balanced amount of theological flexibility and imagination.

In exploring the contents of this structure throughout the course of his theological career, Augustine develops a more extensive and intensive focus on the scriptural and ecclesial witness to the resurrection. In this process, he deploys, contrasts, and adjusts the intellectual and cultural resources that are available to him, especially those of the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophers. These deployments, contrasts, and adjustments enable him to acquire deeper insights into, and to craft finer articulations of, these resurrection contents. All the while, Augustine often enough expresses his constant allergies to bold assertions and hubristic speculations about our eschatological resurrection, of which none of us, in and of ourselves, have any actual and direct experience yet. Reflective of this exploratory approach, we find certain variances and nuances in Augustine's descriptions and evaluations of the kinds and degrees of both death and life, from which and to which the resurrection respectively returns humans.

THE CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

While the resurrection holds a central place in Augustine's theology, scholars have recently brought attention to a discrepant paucity in the number of studies on this topic in the current scholarship on Augustine. Thus, Marie-Anne Vannier has remarked that, despite the fact that "the question of the resurrection has [...] a decisive place in the *oeuvre* of Augustine," his treatments of the resurrection remain

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“paradoxically little studied.”¹² Furthermore, given the decisive importance of the resurrection for Augustine, and “[g]iven th[e] significance assigned to Christ’s own resurrection from the dead in establishing the faith and identity of Christians,” one can hardly disagree with the recent assessment of Gerald O’Collins that “it is surprising that we lack substantial studies of Augustine’s thought in this area.”¹³ This “lack” of current scholarship on Augustine’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection, in particular, has motivated O’Collins to attempt “to fill this important gap”¹⁴ and “to remedy this situation” of “neglect” by “the writing of [his] book,” *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception*.¹⁵ Due to his flagging this “lack,” “gap,” and “neglect,” O’Collins has opened up a field for theological explorations, to which he makes certain contributions in his study. And yet, there still seems to be further research that could be done to bring into brighter light and sharper relief Augustine’s teaching and preaching on the resurrection not only of Jesus Christ, but also of the entire human race.

Along such lines, John Cavadini acknowledges, in his review of O’Collins’s book, that its “major achievement” consists in its opening up space for further theological investigations.¹⁶ As Cavadini writes:

O’Collins does not simply notice a gap that he then fills, but rather that he actually opens a gap where there had been none before. Put more neutrally, he opens a space for continuing significant theological work on a topic whose significance had not been noticed, and where no space had therefore been given.¹⁷

¹² Marie-Anne Vannier, “Saint Augustin et la résurrection,” in *La résurrection chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 7 (Strasbourg: Université Marc Bloch, 2003), pp. 247–254, on p. 247: “Paradoxalement peu étudiée, la question de la Résurrection a, pourtant, une place décisive dans l’oeuvre d’Augustine, [...]”

¹³ O’Collins, *Resurrection of Christ*, p. 3.

¹⁴ O’Collins, *Resurrection of Christ*, p. vi.

¹⁵ O’Collins, *Resurrection of Christ*, p. 115.

¹⁶ John C. Cavadini, review of *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception*, by Gerald O’Collins, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20 (2018): 586–588, on p. 588.

¹⁷ Cavadini, review, p. 588.

Cavadini appreciates that O'Collins's study has provided "a sense of the terrain that Augustine covered and of the enduring significance of his contribution, thus in effect not closing the gap for further adventuresome scholarship on the same topic."¹⁸ In another review, Frances Young suggests two possible advancements beyond O'Collins's thematic study: (1) the addition of tracking chronological developments and (2) the expansion of treating the resurrection not only of Christ, but also of humanity.¹⁹ Hence, there has recently emerged a significant amount of room for finer investigations, especially with respect to development, and for wider searches, especially with respect to focus, into how Augustine handles the resurrection.

TWO MODERN TRENDS

Among previous studies of Augustine's treatments of the resurrection, there are a couple whose contributions epitomize both the merits and the limits of modern scholarly trends in approaching this topic. The first of these modern trends focuses almost exclusively on the resurrection of the body.²⁰ With such an interest, Caroline Walker Bynum, in her *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, explores not only the "ideas about resurrection" of the body, but also "the metaphors, tropes, and arguments in which the ideas were garbed" that patristic and medieval thinkers, including Augustine,

¹⁸ Cavadini, review, p. 588.

¹⁹ See Frances Young, review of *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception*, by Gerald O'Collins, *Theology* 121 (2018): 312–313, p. 312.

²⁰ For Augustine's theology of bodily resurrection, see Pablo Goñi, *La resurrección de la carne según San Agustín*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology, Second Series, 122 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961); Fredrick van Fleteren, "Augustine and the Resurrection," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 12 (1978): 9–15; Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, AAR Dissertation Series 31 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 106–125; Paula Fredriksen, "Vile Bodies: Paul and Augustine on the Resurrection of the Flesh," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 75–87; Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 94–104; Johanna Rákos-Zichy, "The Resurrection Body in Augustine," *Studia Patristica* 24 (2017): 373–384.

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formulate.²¹ Accordingly, Bynum offers insights into Augustine's basic view that "resurrection is restoration both of bodily material and of bodily wholeness or integrity, with incorruption (which includes – for the blessed – beauty, weightlessness, and impassibility) added on."²² In contrast to more organic, dynamic, and developmental images, Augustine, on her reading, basically depicts the resurrection as "the re-collection of bodily bits."²³ While Bynum provides a clever sketch of Augustine's ideas and images of the bodily resurrection, her exclusive focus on the physical resurrection of the body leaves out of consideration his concept of the spiritual resurrection of the soul and his articulations of how these two resurrections mutually impact each other. Thus, even her presentation of the bodily resurrection in Augustine's thought evinces certain limitations due to its less-than-comprehensive approach to the resurrection itself, as Augustine describes it.

The second of these modern trends places greater emphasis both on the plenitude of the resurrection and on the integral wholeness of the resurrected person and community.²⁴ Thus, Henri Marrou, in his *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human*

²¹ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 7.

²² Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 95.

²³ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 99.

²⁴ For Augustine's theology of the resurrection in its plenitude, see Henri I. Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1965 (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1966); Kari E. Borresen, "Augustin, interprète du dogme de la résurrection: Quelques aspects de son anthropologie dualiste," *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969): 141–155; Ramón Areitio, "Tiempo, inmortalidad y resurrección en San Agustín," *Estudios de Deusto* 21 (1973): 327–342; Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 141–146; Brian E. Daley, "Resurrection," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 722–723; Vannier, "Saint Augustin et la resurrection"; Marie-Anne Vannier, "L'anthropologie de S. Augustin," in *Körper und Seele: Aspekte spätantiker Anthropologie*, ed. Barbara Feichtinger, Stephen Lake, and Helmut Seng, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 215 (Munich and Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2006), pp. 207–236, esp. pp. 222–231; Bochet, "Resurrectio." Additionally, Maria Boulding, in her *Gateway to Resurrection* (New York: Burns and Oates, 2010), provides a moving meditation on the human journey toward the resurrection, which draws from Augustine's writings, and which this English translator of *conf.* and *en. Ps.* composed during the twilight of her terminally ill life on earth.

Values, emphasizes how Augustine explores, with “prudence and circumspection,” his “Christian faith” in the resurrection, whose “exemplary type” and “first fruits” have already been accomplished in Christ’s paschal mystery, and whose proclamation in Scripture provides the foundation of its theological elaboration.²⁵ In elaborating on the resurrection, Augustine articulates a vision of the human person and community, and of human history and destiny, that is more holistic than the anthropologies of the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophers and of the Manichaean heretics.²⁶ As Marrou argues:

Through all these variations of vocabulary and viewpoint St. Augustine tries to express a single fundamental truth: man is at one and the same time soul *and* body, flesh *and* spirit; and if man is to be truly saved his salvation must embrace his whole being, and therefore the body must also, by glorious resurrection, be taken up into eternity.²⁷

Although Marrou’s study well highlights, in rather broad strokes, Augustine’s insights into the integral wholeness of resurrected persons, it nevertheless indicates the limits of its attention to the finer details and deeper implications of Augustine’s various writings on the resurrection.

THE PRESENT COURSE OF INVESTIGATION

As a contribution to modern scholarship on Augustine and the resurrection, the present study seeks to investigate Augustine’s teaching and preaching on the resurrection of dead humanity to life. Its scope focuses intensively and extensively on the historical resurrection of the dead human flesh of Christ; on the historical resurrection of the dead human souls of Christians; and on the eschatological resurrection of the dead human bodies not only of the saints, but also of the damned, as Augustine describes them, develops his understanding

²⁵ Marrou, *The Resurrection*, pp. 16–17.

²⁶ See Marrou, *The Resurrection*, pp. 9–14.

²⁷ Marrou, *The Resurrection*, p. 16.

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of them, and draws their interrelationships or signals their lacks thereof. In our exploration, we will seek to track, or at least to mark, momentous chronological developments in Augustine's thoughts on the resurrection, including those shifts and advances that he himself acknowledges later on, especially, though not exclusively, in *Retractationes*. Furthermore, we will also endeavor to articulate the theological significances of these developments, especially in consideration of the particular occasions and contexts from which they emerge and to which they belong.

Over the course of its four parts and epilogue, our study brings into focus and investigates the general contours and detailed contents of Augustine's treatments and defenses of his Catholic faith in the resurrection. Although these parts and their chapters are organized thematically, according to the theological and historical taxis of these resurrections, as Augustine presents them, this organization is somewhat convenient and cosmetic in comparison to how he often handles them in his works. Augustine's treatments of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, of the human soul, and of the human body tend to bleed organically into one another precisely because he views Christ, head and members, as an inseparable unity and cohesive totality. For him, these kinds of resurrection to life are mutually and intrinsically implicated in one another. The organization of this study, therefore, is designed to serve not so much as a series of discrete investigations into disparate kinds of resurrection, but rather as a panoramic and orderly survey of the common space of the multidimensional resurrection in Augustine's theology. To draw an analogy, our investigation is less like going through a chronologically arranged exhibit of Picasso's works of art, distinct period by distinct period, discrete frame by discrete frame. Instead, it is more like entering into the Sistine Chapel or the Boston Public Library, being enveloped all around by the frescos of Michelangelo or the murals of John Singer Sargent, and turning our attention this way, and that way, and this way again, to explore these artistic masterpieces in full and in detail, with an ever-increasing appreciation of their compositional