

Fr Ker always insisted on Newman's relevance to the Church and society in our own time. These essays admirably follow that lead, though they often end up indicating how far the revered Cardinal stands at a remove from the 21st century situation. Critical awareness of this distance should allow questioning between present and past to go both ways.

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A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine's Political Thought by Michael Lamb, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2022, pp. xiii + 431, £30.00, hbk

How does St Augustine understand political life and the stance that Christians in particular should adopt towards it? What can they and others hope for when it comes to politics, and what do Augustine's views on these matters offer Western democracies in the early 21st century? These are the central questions lucidly and patiently addressed by Michael Lamb in this persuasive monograph. The author draws on much scholarship in recent decades on Augustine's philosophical theology and rhetorical pedagogy which Lamb believes has been unfairly neglected by political theorists. He further draws together evidence from Augustine's writings well beyond the small number of texts, such as *City of God* XIX, on which political theorists have often focussed. Across ten chapters divided into three parts, framed by a brief introduction and conclusion, Lamb argues primarily against what he considers to unduly 'pessimistic' readings of Augustine by interpreters such as Herbert Deane, Hannah Arendt, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martha Nussbaum, and John Milbank.

Part I (Chapters 1–5) sets out Augustine's conception of hope, looking first at its 'grammar' or relation to grounds and objects, to faith (or trust) and love, and then to what its proper grounds and objects are as a virtue which restrains presumption on the one hand and despair on the other. This section of the book rejects the idea that Augustine thinks we should hope only for heaven. Though the bishop frequently seeks to wean his flock away from excessive desires for temporal goods, and from misusing these to dominate others, such goods do not necessarily compete with the love of God. Nor does Augustine's controversial distinction between things we 'use' and those we 'enjoy' mean that he instrumentalises people. Rather, attention to the *ordo amoris* (loving things in the right way and to the right extent) reveals that love of God includes a proper love for other people, seen for who they are as God's creatures, and hope for such temporal goods as their health and friendship.

Part II (Chapters 6–7) looks at Augustine's rhetorical practice to ensure that we do not misread him, especially his frequent use of antitheses, but contextualise his

utterances in the light of his goals in any given text. The bishop's vehement denunciations of worldly vice are frequently meant to challenge his flock's excessive attachments, are part of the moral formation of readers and listeners, and so should not be taken as blanket condemnations of what this world offers. Lamb argues in particular that what Augustine says about this world's evils in *City of God* XXII should not be read in isolation from what he teaches elsewhere, and especially from the goods he enumerates at the close of the book.

Part III (Chapters 8–10) studies in more detail Augustine's approach to politics: his encouragement of people to share common objects of hope in the present age; his own exemplary and extensive engagement with politics as a Catholic bishop; and the essential part which humility and piety play in virtuous political engagement, where someone must know their own limits and know what they can hope others may contribute towards obtaining certain goods. This final section of the book is particularly important for its nuanced discussion of a thorny topic: how Augustine understands the relationship between the virtues and religion. Given the link Augustine makes between true or complete virtue and worship of the true God, does he think non-Christians can actually possess the virtues to which they aspire, or only what others have called 'splendid vices'? Lamb is attentive both to the passages where Augustine seemingly disparages pagan claims to real virtue, and to his admiration for the qualities shown by pagans such as Regulus, Cato, and Caesar, which Augustine holds up for Christians to emulate. Without asserting that Augustine explicitly teaches the position, Lamb sketches an Augustinian account of genuine but imperfect civic virtues which non-Christians may possess, and which will include the humility and piety necessary to curb temptations to domination and self-interest. Lamb thereby opens up a space for Christians and non-Christians to collaborate in the public forum. They may share their hopes for genuine political advances, for obtaining proximate goods, even as they differ over the final good. The book ends with a brief Conclusion which highlights what Augustine's vision offers to modern Western democracies, notably a conceptual framework where humility and piety pave the way for an appropriate hope in the right people for the right things which then navigates a way forward between presumption and despair.

This is a valuable book which sifts and synthesises the work of recent scholars, not least Robert Dodaro, Eric Gregory, Veronica Roberts Ogle, and Jennifer Herdt, in order to challenge successfully an older consensus. It may be read profitably by others beyond the field of Augustinian studies and by all interested in a robust account of Christian political engagement.

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