

## Augustine Comes Out of Retirement: *Otium Honestum* to Ordination

Augustine's *Confessions* present a paradox to the modern reader. The sometimes memoir other times apology of the now famous bishop of Hippo obscures the most critical change in the life of Augustine, the very occurrence of which necessitated his writing of the *Confessions* in the first place (Chin 2006). Misunderstanding this phenomenon has led some Augustinian scholars in the past to unduly "paganize" (for lack of a better word) the early Augustine and to unduly Christianize the later Augustine in way that makes him too familiar to modern sensibilities (Lawless 1985, Garvey 1939). When we take Augustine at his word in the *Confessions* we completely miss the nuances of the Augustine that came before.

In my project I aim to recover these nuances by synthesizing the important work that has already been done in this direction by Gillian Clark (2012), James O'Donnell (2005), and Jason BeDuhn (2012) in order to uncover Augustine's personal path to the philosophical life. When we progress with Augustine prospectively rather than retrospectively, we can see the possibility of a much different narrative. I endeavor to do this by following Augustine's pursuit of the ideal of *otium honestum* at Cassiacum, Thagaste, and Hippo (Trout 1988). The examination of these key milestones in Augustine's early career reveals a tension between Augustine's changing personal expectations and the expectations placed upon a retired Roman gentleman.

In this alternative narrative, the dynamic paradigm shift in Augustine's life does not happen in a garden in Milan but on a visit to Hippo. Augustine's early writings show his desire to pursue an ideal philosophical life, not a clerical one. His ordination at Hippo marks his resignation from ever cultivating this philosophical life, even to the point of discouraging others from seeking the same path. It is interesting then, if not also ironic, that this wannabe

philosopher would come to have such a profound impact on medieval and even modern philosophy.

### Bibliography

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