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Background Briefing:

Saint Augustine and the Christian Dialogue Against the 'Pagan' Tradition and Popular Mentality

Topics:
- *The Politics of Cultural Appropriation and Revisionism*
- *The Cultural and Ideological Context*
- *Augustine and the Attack on Popular Mentality*
- *Conclusion: Restructuring Values*

1. The Politics of Cultural Appropriation and Revisionism

During the fourth and fifth centuries intense interaction between Christianity and earlier Roman and Greek tradition had emerged not just as a cultural but also as a political battle. Not just current questions such as the relationship between Rome and Constantinople and the emergence of a divided empire (especially problematic after 395 C.E., see Dudley 1991), the authority of the Emperor in relationship to the Church, and the authority of bishops in relation to their local churches, but the entire meaning of history, Roman and Christian, was at stake. The critical interpretation, re-interpretation, rejection and appropriation of the past helped define authority and the right to power within a transforming series of cultures bracketed within the authority of a severely challenged Roman empire. In this context, Augustine's *The City of God* (early fifth century C.E.) was not so much a work of religious history as a major political reinterpretation of the history of Rome, pointing towards a new relationship between secular power and religious authority.

The City of God was also a recounting and recapping of a huge body of classical thought and history, ranging across the writings of Livy, Sallust, Cicero, Tacitus, Lucan, Apuleius and others (see Hagendahl 1967). Ironically, within this Christian garb many of these earlier writers were preserved as important sources for later European thought. Augustine asked Romans of the fifth century to view the works of these writers and their own tradition in a radically different way to their original uses. In part, this had already been done by the adaptation and revamping of the classical educational curriculum for Christian purposes, although the main Christian training ground remained the moral and direct education found in the home and local Church communities (see Barclay 1959, p247, p261). This would be supplemented by the thought of Christian writers such as Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, and Eusebius (Dudley 1991, p282). Augustine went beyond this, however, to structure a polemic designed to suggest what life within the Empire really was, what its limits were, and what it could and should be. To do this he was willing to cast out and condemn many elements traditionally associated with the Roman state.

This was not just a challenge to the symbolism of the Roman empire. It was also a challenge to the popular mentality and ethics of the time. *The City of God* emerges then as one more stage in the 'Christianisation' of the Empire and its cultures. The work's most obvious message is an extended attack on polytheistic beliefs and traditional Roman religious mores that were still major strata within day-to-day life. This also involved a rejection or relocation of most of the non-Christian works of Roman literature.

The world 'pagan' itself reveals much of this process. The negative focus of the world pagan is a later formulation that could only take force once Christianity was normative. It is thus a negative identification of what is non-Christian, but also has the content of traditional Roman religious beliefs, strongly tainted by Greek and Hellenistic modes of thought.

The City of God supported four overlapping social functions: -

1) It was written to bolster the faith of Christians, which may have been shaken after the 'sack' of Rome in 410 C.E., suggesting that Rome could not remain the centre of world order, or that there had been a serious failure of Rome as the leader of a Christian empire.
2) It was a potential instrument of conversion, providing yet another part of Augustine's long debate with educated 'pagans', schismatic Christians and 'heretics', including religious movements such as the Donatist Church, the Pelagians, and the Manichaean religion (Brown 1979, p289; Frend 1952; Liebeschuetz 1963; for the concept of Christian conversion, see Nock 1972).
3) It provided a subtle rephrasing of the relationship between Christian society and Imperial power, demonstrating that the Empire as such was not theologically privileged, but did provide a necessary material base and peaceful framework for the Christian community.
4) It was a continued attack on the bases of popular mentalities and institutions that reflected non-Christian traditions, especially the theatre, the games, the circus, and the emphasis on earthly glory and pre-eminence that still saturated Roman society and its elites. The debate between Christian and 'pagan' was still intense during this period, and there had been attempts at the revival of a non-Christian religion that might replace its role within the imperial system, e.g. the short-lived attempted under the emperor Julian (361-363 C.E.) to create a synthesized and philosophical polytheism.

In the period under discussion there were strong and direct relationships among political ideology, religion and popular mentality. Speaking of the third and fourth centuries, it has been noted that: -

> The imperial cult had long been a ceremonial celebration of the divinities that were and once had been Roman emperors. Worshipping them enhanced the spiritual life of Rome's provincials as it consolidated their allegiance. Accordingly, when the emperor himself turned Christian in the early fourth century, this entire legacy of commitment and ceremonial, symbolizing the cohesion of the Roman Empire in religious observances over three centuries, had to be reassessed. Neither Constantine nor his successors would have had any great desire to give up one of the richest sources of popular support, and

> yet they could scarcely wish to represent themselves as gods in competition with the one true God. (Bowersock 1986, p299)

The City of God is thus a highly synthetic political text which demonstrates a great deal about the Christian thought of the time and the traditions it opposed. These traditions, though going back to the history of the Roman Republic, were still deeply entrenched in the minds of 'pagan' senators, and also saturated the viewpoints of Romanized populations across much of the empire. The literary importance of *The City of God* has long been recognized, as has its evangelical thrust (Hagendahl 1967, p704). The general tone of this debate is indicated by Augustine's comments o the Christian Marcellinus: -

> The glorious City of God is my theme in this work which you, my dearest son Marcellinus, suggested, and which is due to you by my own promise, I have undertaken its defense against those who prefer their own gods to the Founder of this city, - a city passing glorious . . . And therefore, as the plan of this work we have undertaken requires, we must speak also of the earthly city, which though it be a mistress of the nations, is itself ruled by its lust of rule. (*The City of God* I. Preface).

2. The Cultural and Ideological Context

Since Galerius' toleration of Christianity in C.E. 311 and Constantine's subsequent recognition of and affiliation to that religion (from 312-313 C.E.), the Roman state gradually transformed itself into a Christian empire with strong authoritarian features, mobilizing both imperial and church hierarchies as channels of power and control (see Eusebius *History of the Church* 10.5-10.9; Dudley 1991). Although the process was gradual, the date of 380 C.E. is significant since it was at that time that Christianity was recognized as the official religion of the state (via the Edict of Gratian, Valentian II and Theodosius I, see Coleman-Norton 1966; Croke & Davies 1982, pp19-29), signaling the replacement of a whole range of traditional religious practices which used the symbols and formula of the earlier polytheistic and ritual system that we call 'Roman religion'. The evolution towards Christianity was marked by two strong trends: -

1) An intensive debate between pagan and Christian values within literary, philosophical and educational spheres (Barclay 1959, pp210-219). Christianity appropriated a large section of the classical tradition for its own use (Barclay 1959, p231), but also engaged in a strong attack on the elements of Roman tradition which conflicted with its own beliefs and ethics.
2) The gradual introduction of legislation designed, first, to remove pagan ceremonies from the heart of the state apparatus, and second to control and eventually forbid the worship of other gods, ban pagan writings, and as far as possible forbid the public expression of non-Christian beliefs.

The main elements of this legal transition are summarized in Table I below. Note that during this period dual or colleges emperors (entitled 'Augustus', of the eastern and western parts of the empire, sometimes associated with 'Caesars', in effect sub-emperors of lesser rank) are sometimes found, usually ruling respectively from Rome and Constantinople, or other temporary capitals. This trend reflects the growing weight of

administration forced upon imperial households, and the need to keep strategic control of eastern and northern borders.

Table I: Keys Dates in the Official Acceptance of Christianity and the Repression of Non-Christian Observances and Social Practices. (Derived from Coleman-Norton 1966, pp22-636; Croke & Harries 1982 pp19-29; Bradbury 1994; & Eusebius *Ecclesiastial History*).

Date C.E.	*Edicts, Mandates and Rescripts*
311	Edict of Galerius on toleration of Christians
313	Letter of Constantine restoring property to the Church
321	Mandate of Constantine on Recognition of Sunday
323	Mandate of Constantine on Clerical Immunity from Pagan Sacrifice
324	Probable general proclamation against Pagan Sacrifice (not fully enforced)
341	Letter of Constantine Augustus to Praetorian Prefect against Pagan Sacrifice
356	Letter of Constantius and Constans Augustus Closing Temples.
365	Mandate of Valentinian I and Valesn against the Condeming of Christians to the Arena
371	Mandate of Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian on Release of Christian Players from the Theatre
372	Mandate of Valentinian I & Valens Against Assemblies of Manichees
380	Edict of Gratian, Valentinian II & Theodosius I Establishing Catholic Christianity as Official Religion of the State.
382	Gratian Refuses to Accept the Robes of Pontifex Maximus (ancient Roman Chief Priesthood)
382	Gratian Removes the Altar of Victory from the Senate House
384	Symmachus Petitions Theodosius for Restoration of the Altar of Victory
386	Mandate of Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I Prohibiting Christians as Chief Priests (in Egypt)
388	Mandate of Valentinian II, Theodosius I & Arcadius Banning Public Discussion of Religion
392	Mandate of Valentinian II, Theodosius I & Arcadius Suppressing Games in the Circus (unless on their birthdays)
392	Mandate of Theodosius I, Arcadius and Honorius Prohibiting Pagan Rites Offensive to Christianity
399	Mandate of Arcadius and Honorius on Suppression of Shows on Sunday
399	Letter from Honorious Augustus to Praetorian Prefect, Ordering Demolition of Temples (in the east)
407-8	Letter of Honorius and Theodosius II Enforcing the Suppression of Heretics and Pagans
415	Edict of Honorius and Theodosius II on Allocation of Pagan Religious Property to the Church (addressed to the Carthaginians)
425	Mandate of Theodosius II & Valentinian II on Punishment of Heresy, Perfidy, Schism, Pagan Superstition and Religious Error (leading to Confiscation of Property)

The range of this legislation indicates that there is still something to legislate against, i.e. pagan practices continue to occur down into the fifth century (Croke & Harries 1982, pp25-7) and in residual form in folk custom and belief. The promulgation of a law does not mean it will be effectively implemented, and some of the early letters and

declarations may have been of moral intent rather than an explicit legal injunction, e.g. the early proclamation in 324 against pagan sacrifice that has been disputed by modern scholars (see Bradbury 1994). Many laws are repeated at different dates in the Theodosian Code, suggesting that they were not effective on the first occasion (Croke & Harries 1982, p25). Furthermore, these laws usually do not specify the apparatus with which they are to be carried out, i.e. we cannot be sure without other evidence to what extent they were carried out by the secular or church authorities. Often the cooperation of local governors, city authorities, bishops and Christian communities would be needed to carry through more repressive measures, thought usually only with explicit imperial approval (Bradbury 1994). As noted by Scott Bradbury: -

> Despite the existence of general constitutions airned at pagan cult and pagan sanctuaries, civil officials almost never initiated the coercion of pagans. Aggressive bishops usually instigated these attacks, but normally only after they had secured imperial approval, usually in the form of a rescript addressing a specific situation. When Bishop Porphyry of Gaza, for example, wanted to close Gaza's temples in 398, he did not entreat the local governor to enforce one of the laws ordering the closing of temples, laws that had been in existence for nearly half a century. He worked the patronage network in the time-honored fashion and acquired an imperial rescript. A few years later Porphyry travelled to Constantinople with Bishop John of Caesarea and solicited through the empress, Eudoxia, another rescript ordering the destruction of Gaza's pagan shrines. (Bradbury 1994, p137)

However, even this brief selection of laws suggests that Christianity was incrementally favoured as the official religion, while paganism was restricted, then at various levels proscribed. These laws also show an interest in prescribing ethical conduct, e.g. avoiding actors, limiting the days on which games might occur and reducing the number of gladiatorial shows. This entire procedure is a social and cultural redefinition, with an attempt to marginalize and then destroy pagan cultic practices, and then pagan doctrines. This involved an attack not just on rival religious organizations, e.g. schismatic churches and pagan temples, but it also involved a major program undermining popular mentalities. This was largely done by the Churches and their brethren, but on occasion could be supported by secular laws and their enforcement. This made sense from a Christian perspective since gladiatorial contests were originally rooted in early Roman and Italian funeral traditions, while competitive public games had originally been held in parallel with religious festivals and usually involved public sacrifices. Gladiatorial games probably first appeared in Rome in 264 B.C.E., when the sons of Iunius Brutus decided to honour their dead father by matching three pairs of slaves against each other (Auguet 1972, p19). Special amphitheatres to view such events developed in Campania in the 2nd century B.C.E. (Humphrey 1986, p1). The gladiatorial games had not become a regular official function in Rome until 105 B.C.E., where they were associated with placating the gods and the spirits of dead ancestors (Carcopino 1981, pp228-229). However, it seems likely that they were known on a semi-regular basis in the early 2nd century B.C.E. onwards. The first permanent amphitheatre in Rome was that of Statilius Taurus, in 29 B.C., and burnt down in the great fire of A.D. 64 (Humphrey 1986, p1). It was only after this, in 80 C.E., that Titus would dedicate the great amphitheatre we know as the Colosseum - this seems to have been a masterly stroke of propaganda perhaps directed against the earlier regime of Nero, as well as an active example of patronage to

the Roman population In this context, early Christian emperors acknowledged that public games did form part of the civic structure of city life in the empire, and thus were careful not to ban them wholesale, but sought to reduce official entanglement with non-Christian rituals, especially blood sacrifice and gladiatorial games (Bradbury 1994).

This official movement away from traditional Roman values can be demonstrated by one critical debate with widespread political and symbolic implications. The debate over the status of the Altar of Victory in Rome clearly shows the existence of an elite group of pagans in Rome during the fourth century that actively sought to retain non-Christian Roman traditions. The Altar of Victory was a pagan altar (with an associated statue) in the Senate House at Rome, dedicated to the glories and victories of the Roman State.

In 384 the prominent senator and writer Symmachus wrote a *relatio*, a petition, to Theodosius I asking for the restoration of the Altar of Victory, which had been removed in A.D. 382. Symmachus' reasons included: -

> We seek therefore to have the religious institutions that have served the state weal for so long . . . Who is such a good friend of the barbarians that he does not want the altar of Victory back? We are cautious with regard to the future and avoid omens of change. If she cannot be honoured as a God, at least let her name be honoured. Your Eternities owe a great debt to Victory and will owe more still. Let those who have gained nothing from her turn their backs on her power, but do not yourselves forsake her friendship and patronage with the triumph it brings. All men should pray to her power. (Symmachus *Relatio* II.3 in Croke & Harries 1982, p36)

Further on, speaking of the cutting of funds to the traditional priesthoods and the Vestal Virgins, Symmachus adds: -

> Because of this deed a general famine has resulted and bad harvests have disappointed the expectations of all the provinces. (Symmachus *Relatio* II.3 in Croke & Harries 1982, p36)

What is striking about both passages is the use of the traditional notion of the patronage of the gods in aiding Rome's strength and prosperity, a notion that was central to the public role of religion since the early Republic (Scullard 1981, p31; Macmullen 1981, pp57-9). The proper performance of ritual, particularly appropriate sacrifice, was viewed as part of the essential obligation of the state in receive the aid of the gods, and established good order between man and the divine world. From the point of view of Symmachus and his follows, without this support Rome and its empire would fall victim to natural and man-made disasters.

Both Christians and pagans accepted that divine help was required in running the empire, and sought divine aid. But the kind of divine order appealed to differed radically in the two groups. Saint Ambrose gives his view of the use of the Altar of Victory in the Senate: -

> If today, Emperor, some pagan were to set up an altar with images (heaven forbid!) and were to force the Christians to assemble there to take part in sacrifices, to have the breath and mouths of the faithful choked with ash from the altar, dust from the sacrifice,

> smoke from the burning offering; if he were to give his opinion in that senate where they would be compelled to their opinion after swearing before the altar of that image . . . the Christian forced to attend the senate faced with this choice would think he was being persecuted. (Ambrose, Letter XVII.9 in Croke & Harries 1982, p32).

Both Ambrose and Symmachus clearly see the ideological implications of the Altar. Ambrose, after having emphasized the word 'prosecuted', with all its echoes of past state persecutions of Christians, goes on to add that the views of a few pagans should not be taken to represent the general will of the Senate (Ambrose, Letter XVII.10 in Croke & Harries 1982, p33). Even if the petition represented the majority vote of the Senate in a particular session, Ambrose tried to represent the Senate as composed mainly of Christians (Ambrose, Letter XVII.10 & Letter XVIII.31 in Croke & Harries 1982, p33 & p48), many of whom were presumably not present for the vote.

Although it is not possible to discover from our currently available sources the exact number of pagans and Christians in the Senate at this time (Matthews 1975, pp206-7), it is clear that there was at least a sizeable pagan minority in the 380's. Traditional Roman religion, including sacrifices at public events and meetings, still played a routine role in state practices, while in many Graeco-Roman cults sacrifice remained the ‘central ritual act’ (Bradbury 1994, p120). This was more than a nostalgic sentiment, or a polite erudition concerning the past - it was an active attempt to avoid allowing Christianity total dominance as an official ideology. This resistance was initially defeated by Ambrose, but the 'pagan opposition' persisted down to the restoration of the Altar in 392 by Eugenius. However, it was finally removed again in A.D. 394 (Croke & Harries 1982, pp50-51), probably due to further Christian agitation.

How far did these cultural and ideological commitments persist into the fifth century? Symmachus himself died in A.D. 402, but respect for pagan traditions continued. The poet, Rutilius Namatianus, for example, writes in self-consciously pagan terms: -

> As authors of our race we acknowledge Venus and Mars - mother of the sons of Aeneas, father of the scions of Romulus: clemency in victory tempers armed strength: both names befit thy character: hence thy noble pleasure is war and in mercy . . . thou too, hast embraced the world in triumphs fraught with law, dost make all things live under a common covenant. (Rutilius Namatianus *A Voyage Home to Gaul* I.65-83)

These religious concepts are once again connected with the idea or world order and law earned by the glories of Rome's past, at once providential in the sense of a religious-based fate and a justified *imperium*. This pagan tradition continues in the work known to us as the *Saturnalia*, which Alan Cameron associates with a Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius who was a praetorian prefect of Italy in A.D. 430 (Cameron 1966, pp26-7). The work is virtually a compendium of pagan beliefs and traditions, and once again indicates how active these non-Christian traditions were in the fifth century.

3. Augustine and the Attack on Popular Mentality

We have seen that there was certainly a small group of elite Romans active during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, exemplified by the writings of Symmachus, Rutilius

Namatianus and Macrobius. These might be viewed as exceptional elite and literary visions divorced from their social contemporaries. However, it is possible to gain a further glimpse of the popular mentality of the Roman people, and the African citizen population with whom Augustine was familiar (in the areas around Hippo and Carthage, for example). Three forms of mass entertainment demonstrate this wider mentality; gladiatorial shows, the circus, and the theatre.

Although the gladiatorial training-schools had already been abolished in 399 C.E., and their displays officially banned in 404 (Friedlander 1965, Vol IV, Appendix xxxv, p192), they form an interesting foil to Augustine's moral orientation. Speaking to his friend Alypus in an earlier work, *The Confessions* (written by 398 C.E.), Augustine provides the following account of a visit to the arena: -

> When they had got in and taken their places in such seats as were available, the whole place was boiling with the most savage passions. With his eyelids tightly closed, he forbade his to go out to such wicked things. Would that he had been able to stop his ears, too! For, when one man fell in the fight and an immense roar from the whole audience struck his ears with a violent shock, he was overcome by curiosity. Convinced that, whatever it was like, he could defy and overcome it, he opened his eyes and was wounded more seriously in his soul than the gladiator, whom he lusted to observe, had been wounded in his body. Thus he fell more wretchedly than that man whose fall had caused the uproar which had entered through his ears and laid bare his eyes so that the means was provided by which his daring mind could be wounded and knocked down . . . As he looked upon the blood, he drank in the savagery at the same time. (*Confessions*VI.8)

This vivid description shows that the gladiatorial displays remained active in late fourth century Carthage. Furthermore, this view of it as a morally degrading temptation is at variance with earlier Roman thought on the subject. When these games had been officially introduced in Rome (105 B.C.E.) where they were associated with placating the gods and the spirits of dead ancestors (Carcopino 1981, pp228-229). During the early Empire these games were given by newly appointed consuls and praetors, and especially the Emperors, to whom these displays formed part of the patronage to the plebeian classes. Augustus himself was said to have disposed of ten thousand gladiators in eight games, while also staging mock sea battles involving more than thirty ships and three thousand men, (apart from rowers), in a specially constructed artificial lake (*Res Gestae* 22-23). The gladiatorial displays had originated as something 'deeply religious' (Balsdon 1969, p248), and served as part of the cycle of festivals and games which structured the Roman year. Moreover, feelings could run very high in these games, especially if local rivalries were involved, as indicated by an incident in Pompeii during the reign of the emperor Nero, recorded by Tacitus: -

> At about this time there was a serious fight between the inhabitants of two Roman settlements, Nuceria and Pompeii. It arose out of a trifling incident at a gladiatorial show given by Livineius Regulus . . . During an exchange of taunts - characteristic of these disorderly country towns - abuse led to stone-throwing, and then swords were drawn. The people of Pompeii, where the show was held, came off best. Many wounded and mutilated Nucerians were taken to the capital. Many bereavements, too, were suffered by parents and children. The emperor instructed the senate to investigate the affair. The

> senate passed it to the consuls. When they reported back, the senate debarred Pompeii from holding any similar gathering for ten years. (Tacitus *Annals* XIV.15-17)

These events were sufficiently well known to have been preserved in a wall painting from Pompeii, which seems to show street-fighting outside the arena as well (Cornell & Matthew 1987, p112). Such criticisms of gladiatorial contests as are found in the first century C.E., however, are based on the unruliness of gladiators and their followers, the use of such displays for inappropriate political purposes, and use of gladiators as bodyguards or faction fighters. The ethics and ideals of such contests *per se* are rarely challenged, though there is some slight drift towards a more humanitarian view of slaves (Dudley 1991, p283), women and other special groups during the first and second centuries C.E.

However, by the time of Augustine we can see an tension developing between a proportion of the public which is still fascinated by these displays, and a new ethical concern which sees them as something both inhumane and vile. In *The City of God* we find a general criticism of the Roman games, especially in their relation to traditional religious practices: -

> Now, therefore, let us see how it is that they dare to ascribe the very great extent and duration of the Roman Empire to those gods whom they contend that they worship honourably, even by the obsequites of vile games and the ministry of vile men . . . (*The City of God* IV.3)

This criticism also extended to plays as cultic enactments representing pagan gods: -

> The gods themselves have loudly demanded that these plays should be exhibited in their honour, have fiercely exacted them, have menaced destruction unless they are performed, have avenged its neglect with great severity, and have manifested pleasure at the reparation of such neglect . . . What sensible man does not see that men, having been put upon by malignant demons, from those whose domination nothing but the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord sets free, have compelled by force to exhibit such gods as these, plays which, if well advised, they should condemn as shameful? (*The City of God* IV.26)

Indeed, Augustine generally viewed theatre-goers as enemies of the 'City of God': -

> So, too, as long as she is a stranger in the world, the city of God has in her communion, and bound to her by the sacraments, some who shall not eternally dwell in the lot of saints. Of these, some are not now recognized; others declare themselves, and do not hesitate to make common cause with our enemies in murmuring against God, whose sacramental badges they wear. These men you may today see thronging the churches with us, tomorrow crowding the theatres with the godless. (*The City of God* I.35).

Bearing in mind the licentiousness and bawdy humour of much Roman comedy, the lewd contents of pantomimes, and the mixed seating arrangement in the theatre (Friedlander, Vol I, pp246-7), this view of Augustine's is not surprising.

The Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens, build on the slopes of the Acropolis circa 161 C.E., indicates the importance of public displays of music and theatre in major cities in empire. (Photo © R. James Ferguson 1994)

Chariot races did continue through the later Christian period, becoming especially important in Constantinople. The popularity of this sport can be demonstrated by the huge dimensions of the audience seating arrangements of the Circus Maximus, and the popularity and fame of prominent charioteers in society (Carcopino 1981, pp236-241; cf Cameron 1973). During the later Empire the different factions of the circus (Blues and Greens) certainly added to the violence of politics within Constantinople, though it does not seem possible to divide these groups along class lines (Cameron 1976, pp99-104), nor along a simple division between orthodox and monophysite religious views (Cameron 1976, p152). Rather, Alan Cameron would have us tie these later social phenomena into notions of suppressed ritual violence: -

> It is clear enough from the evidence here collected that there is a direct connection between the games and factional misbehaviour, just as there is between the football stadium and soccer hooliganism today. But in neither case is the violence to be explained solely in terms of the excitement generated by the dancers or footballers. Other factors certainly are involved. In both cases there is undoubtedly a ritual element, the 'ritual violence' which a social anthropologist has recently claimed as a typical feature of the phenomena which he calls 'male bonding'. The games can serve as a field where the youth who otherwise lives an ordinary and unexciting life can prove himself a man by fighting and destroying, hunting in a pack with peers; for an hour or two he can be an object of fear to all who cross his path. (Cameron 1976, pp295-296)

It is possible that in a somewhat sublimated form, the chariot races took over the function earlier on fulfilled by gladiatorial contests. They both emphasize an enduring aspect of Roman culture, both high and low. Roman political life was extremely competitive, just as the realities of Roman social life always recognized the possibilities of violence and cruelty (see Hopkins 1983, Vol. II). Roman society remained competitive in its core, even if the Imperial system had sought to moderate and limit that competition.

It is just this focus on glory, pride and competition in the Roman tradition which Augustine criticizes: -

> At that time it was their greatest ambition either to die bravely or to live free; but when liberty was obtained, so great a desire of glory took possession of them, that liberty alone was not enough unless dominion also should be sought . . . (*The City of God* V.12)

Furthermore, this desire must remain part of the earthly city, the counterpoint to Augustine's conception of the city of God: -

> But since those Romans were in an earthly city - not in the sphere of eternal life, but in the sphere of demise and succession, where the dead are succeeded by the dying - what else but glory should they love, by which they wished even after death to live in the mouths of their admirers? (*The City of God* V.14)

This simple statement is a sweeping rejection of several motifs that had been a driving force in Roman life: the emphasis on glorious ancestors, high status won by deeds or office, and the public recognition of nobility or pre-eminence. If these motivations had already become dangerously outmoded as a form of invalid ambition once the Empire was firmly established, they were now rejected outright by a Christian religious morality that would shift status and power onto a divine stage. This already represents an evolution beyond the formulation found in an imperial letter preserved in Eusebius: -

> Many facts combine to prove that the sad neglect of religious observance, by which the highest reverence for the most holy, heavenly Power is preserved, has brought great dangers upon the community, and that the lawful restoration and preservation of the same has conferred the greatest good fortune on the Roman name, and wonderful prosperity on all mankind – blessings conferred by divine benevolence. (Eusebius *History of the Church* 10.7)

For Eusebius, the religious observance here is that of the 'Catholic' Church, and Rome's Fortune seems conditional rather than a compactual. By Augustine's later thought this fortune was necessary as a beneficial temporal framework but did not constitute a privileged community.

4. Conclusion: Restructuring Values

Augustine attacked the gladiatorial games and the theatre, which were gradually repressed or modified in content during the late antique period. Certain elements of mass participation were still pursued through the chariot races common to the cities of the Western and Eastern Empire. Other areas of popular mentality can be cast into relief by the debate between pagan and Christian values. Sexuality and the role of women, were example, went through profound changes from the late Republic till Augustine's time. Although elite woman had always been cloistered to some degree in Roman society, and used for family and political marriages, we find an explicit sexuality and sophisticated eroticism in the writings of Romans such as Catullus, Ovid and Petronius (see Veyne 1988). In the Christianizing of Roman social life, we find two trends; a shift towards total sexual renunciation, and a parallel shift, especially supported by the older Augustine, to

bring orderly sexual relations within the ambit of a Christian marriage aimed at raising children (Brown 1990, pp387-427). The latter option, of course, was essential for the success of the Church within earthly societies. The kind of renunciation involved and the views on family life were subtly different to pagan Roman concepts of virginity and the family (Brown 1990, p5-32). Likewise, there was an attempt to shift away from *eros* as a philosophical and social ideal involving a kind of uplifting desire (as exemplified by Plato's *Symposium*), towards the notion of *agape* as a universal, non-transactional, non-discriminating type of regard for others (see Nygren 1982; Outka 1972; Singer 1984).

It can be seen, then, that Augustine was engaged not only in a dialogue against Roman religion, against privileged political power based on a pagan past, but also in a debate with enduring Roman values which had been forged in the Republic and passed on down through the early Empire. In this light we can see that *The City of God* is not just directed against the elite senatorial group which followed Symmachus. It was an attempt to find the necessary vision to restructure a society and its culture through new social values: those derived from the heavenly city. In this restructuring Rome was privileged, but not eternal.

5. Bibliography and Further Reading

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