



Slavery, Redemption, and Manumission as Structural Metaphors in Augustine's Theology

Across his corpus, Augustine strikingly and recurrently deploys the three cognate metaphors of slavery to sin, redemption from sin, and slavery to God. I argue that Augustine's use of these theological metaphors is thoroughly contoured by the legal and social strictures governing slavery and freedom in the later Roman empire. To develop this argument, I pay close attention to the economic and legal connotations of some key terms in Augustine's lexicon of salvation—like *manumissio*, *redemptio*, and *libertas*—and seek to tease out the social, legal, and economic logic they encapsulate. As I show, the concept of *dominium* underwrites Augustine's description of the prelapsarian *ordo naturalis* as a chain of hierarchical relationships: between God and man, soul and body, male and female. The notion that human beings are enslaved to sin, subject to the *condicio servitutis* from birth, evokes the situation of laboring tenants (*coloni*) bound to the land through their *origo*. Moreover, the bishop of Hippo's descriptions of captivity to the devil and liberation through the interpellation (*interpellatio*) of God the Redeemer are informed by the contemporary reality of barbarian captivity and *liberales causae*, so richly described in Augustine's Letter 10*. Finally, Augustine's characterization of Christian service in terms of a state of simultaneous freedom and servitude implicitly draws upon the legal norms governing the relationship of freed captives to their redeemers, as well as the obligations of *obsequium* and *gratia* which freedmen owed to their former masters.

KEYWORDS: Augustine, slavery, manumission, redemption, freedmen, Christianity, theology, Later Roman Empire, late antiquity, metaphor, North Africa

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Sometime around 410 AD, the bishop Augustine delivered a sermon to his congregation in the North African port city of Hippo Regius.¹ The text he had chosen for the message was Psalm 64:10: “The just man will take delight in the Lord and hope in him, and all the upright of heart shall be praised.” In the course of his exposition, Augustine expatiated on what it means to be faithful to the Master (*Dominus*) who demands loyalty (or faith: *fides*) from his worshippers. What is this *fides*, Augustine asked, and how can anyone value invisible *fides* above tangible, material wealth in gold? To explain, Augustine conjured up a vivid scene for his listeners:

You bring your slave into the church to be manumitted. Silence falls. Your certificate is read out or your wish is executed. You state that you are manumitting the slave because he has preserved loyalty (*fidem*) toward you in all respects. This is what you love, this is what you honor, this is what you are rewarding with the prize of freedom. You do what you can. You make him free, because you are not able to make him everlasting. Your God calls out to you and convicts you in the person of your slave. He says to you in your heart, “You brought your slave from your house to my house. You want to summon him back from my house into your house as a free man. Why are *you* a bad slave in *my* house? You are giving him what you can. I am promising *you* what *I* can. You make him free because he preserved loyalty; I make you everlasting, if you preserve loyalty toward me. Why are you still arguing with me in your mind? Render to your Master that which you praise in your slave.”²

The value of this passage lies partly in the details it offers about a procedure for slave manumission which arose in the later Roman empire, *manumissio in ecclesia*—a potent manifestation of the institutional power exercised by the post-Constantinian church in both public and private spheres.³ But this passage also illustrates the imbrication of Roman political and legal concepts within the thought-world of late ancient Christianity and of one of its most influential exponents. Augustine’s use of *fides*—a crucial term in philosophic reflection, commercial interaction, and imperial ideology—to describe the peculiar virtue of the Christian in relation to God represents one indication of this close

1. For the date, which unfortunately cannot be fixed with much precision, see Rotelle 1990: 29n.1.

2. *Sermo* 21.6 (CCSL 51.281,159–282,171). Augustine’s works are quoted, where possible, from the standard editions of the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [CCSL] or the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [CSEL] by volume, page number, section number, and line number(s); otherwise from the *Patrologia Latina* [PL] by volume and column number(s). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. The reader will note that I use “Master,” rather than the conventional “Lord,” as the translation for the Latin *dominus* when referring to God or Christ; the reasons for this should become clear in the course of the essay. Some earlier gestures in this direction: O’Donnell 2005: 7; Ruden 2017: xxxi–xxxii.

3. On *manumissio in ecclesia*, see Harper 2013: 473–85, esp. 483–85. For the relevant legal prescriptions: *Cod. Theod.* 4.7.1 (Mommsen 1990: 1:179).

relationship.⁴ More strikingly still, Augustine coopts the terminology, legal norms, and social connotations of slavery, manumission, and freedom to configure and flesh out the relationship between human beings and God, the Master of creation and of each of his creatures. What does it mean, in Augustine's terminology, to be a slave (*servus*) in God's house (*domus*)? That is the question which inspires this essay.

Slavery can rightly be called a governing metaphor for Augustine's theology. It is ubiquitous in his sermons, commentaries, treatises, and letters. In one sense, this does not come as a great surprise. Chattel slavery was still flourishing in Augustine's world of Roman North Africa in the early fifth century,⁵ and traffic in slaves represented a significant chunk of the commercial transactions between Africa, Constantinople, and the West. Augustine was drawing on daily experience when he told his congregation, "All slavery is full of bitterness; all those who are bound to servile status (*condicione servili*) murmur as they slave away."⁶ And throughout the Roman empire, the relationship between slave and master functioned as a paradigmatic metaphor for political assertions of imperial preeminence,⁷ for philosophical and religious topoi like the domination of reason over the passions, and for literary commonplaces like the helpless lover.⁸ Slavery and freedom, that is to say, metaphorically structured the conceptual world and lived experience of the Romans; they were "metaphors we live by," in the trenchant analysis of Lakoff and Johnson.⁹ When it comes to Augustine, therefore, the conceptual force of words like slavery, manumission, dominion, and redemption cannot be grasped apart from the social realities underlying them. As Dale Martin has helpfully emphasized in his study of the slavery metaphor in the New Testament, "To define the meaning of slavery as a metaphor one must examine the function of such language

4. On *fides*, see Morgan 2015. Morgan helpfully problematizes Augustine's oft-cited distinction in *De trinitate* 13.2.5 between *fides quae creditur* and *fides qua creditur* (roughly, the objective and subjective facets of *fides*), though without discussing the semantics of *fides* in Augustine's corpus more broadly (28–29).

5. The literature on Roman slavery is vast. Bibliography up to 1982 in Miller 1985, esp. 249–306 (ancient slavery), with additions in Miller 1993. A relatively up-to-date online bibliography is available at <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/bib>. The seminal discussion of ancient slavery is Finley 1980, esp. 11–66. For the later Roman empire in particular, Harper 2013 argues convincingly for the continued vitality of slavery throughout the long fourth century; see also Rio 2017. For a useful theoretical discussion of the concepts of slavery and freedom in antiquity, with historical survey, see Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005: 14–27.

6. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 99.7 (CCSL 39.1397,7,1–3).

7. To mention but one example, Lavan 2013 draws attention to the prominence of the language and imagery of chattel slavery in Roman descriptions of the imperial provinces.

8. See, e.g., Greene 1998.

9. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, esp. 106–114 on the meaning of "metaphor" as distinct from both "abstraction" and "homonymy." It is important to note that I use "metaphor" in Lakoff and Johnson's sense, to refer to a lexeme, concept, or mutually cohesive group of concepts that feeds into a (socio-cultural) conceptual structure, and not in the basic sense of an extended or non-literal application of a word or phrase, such as the use of *liberare* in a phrase like "to be freed from illness." The latter is simply a matter of *latina consuetudo* ("the conventions of Latin speech"), as Augustine remarks in *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 41.1 (CCSL 36.357,30–358,44).

within a particular context. . . . To ask what the language meant is to ask how it was used; that use can be ascertained only by examining the full social context.”¹⁰ The social and economic conditions and judicial norms of the Roman empire in Augustine’s day provide the indispensable reference point for his theological deployment of slavery and associated concepts. More than that, we can see Augustine drawing upon both his own and his audience’s experience of these phenomena in how he formulates a Christian theology of liberty and servitude.

This is all the more true because Augustine not only inhabited a world that was economically structured by and dependent on the institution of slavery, but was himself an important agent in contestations over slavery and freedom, that is, over *condicio* (legal status). Thanks to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction known as *episcopalis audientia*, bishops had the authority to adjudicate cases involving personal status (*liberales causae*), and Augustine devoted much time and energy to such deliberations.¹¹ The new letters of Augustine uncovered by Johannes Divjak in the 1980s (Letters 10*–29*),¹² particularly Letter 10* and Letter 24*, show the bishop of Hippo soliciting professional advice on the minutiae of laws governing personal status and seeking new legal measures from the imperial court to counteract the devastating impact of slave dealers (*mangones*) in the coastal regions of North Africa. Moreover, although Augustine’s education in rhetoric did not include legal training per se, scholars have tended to agree of late that he was well versed in judicial matters, including the laws governing personal status.¹³ It is a central contention of this essay that the slavery metaphor as it structures Augustine’s anthropology, his understanding of the human being in relation to God, cannot be divorced from the various dimensions of Roman slavery—including manumission, the colonate, and disputes over legal status—with which he was deeply familiar and personally involved.

Much ink has been spilled on situating Augustine’s understanding of slavery and freedom in the context of earlier Jewish and Christian discourse on the subject, particularly the writings of Paul. It is undeniable that Augustine’s pervasive recourse to this set of terms and concepts stems in large part from the currency of these metaphors in the New Testament: as we shall see, his frequent comments on Christian slavery and freedom are almost always occasioned by the language of Scripture. But without diminishing the potency of these theological influences on Augustine’s metaphorical imagination, it is equally striking, and less often appreciated, how his deployment of slavery language in philosophical and religious contexts is closely bound up with, and evokes in precise detail, the social, political,

10. Martin 1990: xx.

11. On *episcopalis audientia*, see Raikas 1997; Lepelley 1983b; Harries 1999: 191–211; Lenski 2001; and especially Humfress 2011, a fresh and critical scrutiny of the patchy legal evidence which prudently cautions against construing the right of “the bishop’s court” in overly broad and overly formal terms.

12. See Lepelley 1983a.

13. For references, see Elm 2017: 11 and n.47.

and economic dynamics of slavery in the later Roman empire.¹⁴ Scholars who deal with the topic of Augustine and slavery tend to follow one of three general approaches. The first is to canvass his writings for historical details about slavery and the slave trade in Roman North Africa.¹⁵ This is a worthy task, to be sure, and one which has significantly advanced our understanding of how the slave system operated in the late fourth and early fifth century. A second approach is followed by scholars who aim to unearth Augustine's theoretical beliefs about the institution of slavery, its origins, and its moral rectitude.¹⁶ A third approach focuses on slavery and freedom as philosophical and theological concepts, especially in relation to Augustine's doctrine of free will.¹⁷ Expositions in the latter class, while they address the function of slavery as a conceptual metaphor in Augustine's thought, often underplay the full significance of the metaphor by failing to take the terms quite in their fullest sense.¹⁸

More work is needed to understand the connection in Christian authors of the later Roman empire between what Chris de Wet denominates "metaphorical slavery" and "institutional slavery."¹⁹ A notable contribution to this program is a recent

14. Addressing the theme of God's paternal discipline in Augustine's theology, Garnsey 1997 acknowledges that "his doctrine may well—and is commonly thought to—reflect behavioural patterns in contemporary North African society" (116), where the whip was a ubiquitous instrument of punishment, but doubts whether such discussions can be very useful for social history, given the predominance of Scriptural texts in molding Augustine's handling of the topic. Caution is certainly called for in using Augustine's writings as a window onto North African society; nevertheless, it is undeniable that this social context served to shape Augustine's theological ideas.

15. Thus, for instance, the seminal article of Mary 1954. Since the publication of the Divjak letters, virtually all scholars writing about late Roman economy and social history have turned to Augustine for information. See, for instance, the valuable collection of essays edited by Divjak 1983, as well as Harper 2013: 92–95.

16. Thus, for instance, Klein 1988: 53–169; Garnsey 1999: 206–219; Glancy 2002; and (in part) Corcoran 1985.

17. Thus, for instance, Corcoran 1985; Karfiková 2012; Nisula 2012. Of these, Corcoran (whose book is still the most extensive discussion of the topic) comes closest to drawing together the theological and the social-political: he begins his monograph with a summary of the social realities of slavery in North Africa and Augustine's involvement as manifested by the Divjak letters, while the second chapter of his work ("The Origin and Nature of Slavery") analyzes the role of slavery in Augustine's theology, though without bringing it into close correlation with either legal principles or social practice. I must demur from Corcoran's premise that "Augustine's interest [in slavery and freedom] was essentially theological and not sociological or economic" (57). To see Augustine's interest in the practical side of slavery as merely a derivation from his theological presuppositions, as Corcoran does, is to misconstrue or, at best, oversimplify the relationship between the social and the theoretical. One might just as well say that Augustine assigns such a prominent place to slavery in his religious thought largely because of his extensive personal involvement with the social, political, and judicial realities of slavery in Roman North Africa.

18. A shortcoming that also afflicts scholars of slavery in the New Testament and early Christian thought, as noted by Martin 1990: xx. As Lyall puts it (1984: 28), "There is a certain quaint charm in being 'a slave of Christ' because we are accustomed to speak of ourselves as 'slaves' only metaphorically"; see also 183–89 for germane comments and cautions on the dangers of interpreting metaphors like this either too narrowly or too broadly.

19. De Wet 2015: 46—from a superb study of the function of slavery as metaphor in the writing and preaching of John Chrysostom. A study of this sort for Augustine remains a desideratum.

article by Susanna Elm, who interrogates the legal issues sketched in Letters 10* and 24* alongside Augustine's contemporaneous controversy with Julian of Eclanum over original sin. Elm asks whether "Augustine's awareness and mastery of the complexity of freedom and slavery in his administrative work shape[d] his theological thinking,"²⁰ and convincingly shows that this was indeed the case, at least with the concepts of *origo* and *condicio*. The thesis Augustine defended doggedly against Julian—that fallen human beings are constrained by a *condicio* that derives from the *tradux peccati* ("vine-branch of sin")—must be viewed in connection with the legal status of tenants (*coloni*) who were bound to the land by birth (*per originem*), an evolving institutional arrangement in which Augustine had a personal and professional interest, as borne out by the Divjak letters.²¹ Elm's article well illustrates the fruitfulness of an approach which unites the metaphorical or so-called "theological" side of slavery and freedom with the institutional.

The present paper seeks to advance Elm's argument by showing how Augustine's theological discourse about the three interrelated themes of slavery to sin, redemption from sin, and slavery to God is both explicitly and implicitly informed by the praxis of servitude and liberty in the later Roman empire. To this end, I pay close attention to the economic and legal connotations of some of the key terms in Augustine's lexicon of salvation—like *manumissio*, *redemptio*, and *libertas*—and seek to tease out (as Elm has done with the term *origo*) "the social, legal, and economic logic" they encapsulate.²² The goal here is to understand how culturally embedded and legally established norms and patterns related to slavery and freedom shaped Augustine's conceptual world as manifested in his sermons and treatises. Broadly speaking, then, the interpretive methodology of this essay is not primarily a "history of ideas" approach which concentrates on literary and philosophical development, nor a "sociological" approach governed by theoretical models, but a "social-historical" approach which examines how Augustine's conceptual system is contoured by social, economic, and political realities.²³ I begin with Augustine's reflections on the origins of human *dominium* and the pervasive metaphor of "slavery to sin" as it relates to *condicio* or legal status.

SLAVERY TO SIN AND THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN DOMINATION

Aside from the standard Latin term for servitude, *servitus*, Augustine often uses the word *dominium* and its verbal cognate *dominare* to refer to metaphorical slavery of various kinds. *Dominium* is a *vox propria* of the Roman legal system, designating "the mastery or the absolute control over a thing except as one may be restrained by law."²⁴ One could have such a right of property ownership either in

20. Elm 2018: 16.

21. Elm 2018: 14–15. On the late Roman colonate, see esp. Grey 2007.

22. Elm 2018: 16.

23. For this distinction see Garrett 1992: 90. On the sociology of antiquity vs. the social history of antiquity, see also Harrill 1995: 4–7.

24. Burdick 1938: 325.

one's own things (*iura in sua re*) or, in limited or partial form, in things belonging to another (*iura in re aliena*). The semantic sphere of *dominium*, then, is fundamentally that of property ownership. As we shall see, Augustine uses this term to describe the principles of right and possession bound up in the created order (*ordo naturalis*) and in various kinds of relationships: between God and man, soul and body, men and women, parents and children.

In his *Questions on Genesis*, Augustine explicitly addresses the origin of *servitus* and *dominatio* among human beings. Commenting on the fact that the patriarchs were commended for being herders of flocks, he remarks, "Justly so—for without any doubt this is what just slavery (*iusta servitus*) and just domination (*iusta dominatio*) is: for beasts to be subject to mankind (*serviunt*) and for mankind to have dominion over beasts (*dominatur*)." He cites the divine mandate of Genesis 1:26—"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth"—as proof of the general principle that "reason ought to have dominion (*dominari*) over irrational life. But that one man should be a slave to another has been brought about either by wickedness (*iniquitas*) or misfortune (*adversitas*)."²⁵ Slavery among human beings is therefore foreign to the order of the world as it was created by God; it is the product of either wickedness or misfortune. For instance, Canaan's slavery to his brothers resulted from his own wickedness; Joseph's from misfortune. Augustine makes precisely the same point in book 19 of *On the City of God*.²⁶ By nature, no human being has a right of property over another, and so the state of servitude (*condicio servitutis*) is not part of the created order but rather a consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve. Nowhere does the Bible mention the word "slave" until the punishment of Canaan, showing that "it was not nature (*natura*) but wrongdoing (*culpa*) that merited this designation."²⁷ In Augustine's archaeology of slavery, then, sin is the primal cause of slavery, the rationale for the existence of the *condicio servitutis*.²⁸

Despite these claims, Augustine is equally clear in his assertion that relationships of subjection and domination did exist before the fall as part of the natural order, with the rational having precedence and control over the irrational: God over man, soul over body, man over woman, parents over children. In his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, Augustine addresses the much-debated pronouncement of punishment against Eve found in Genesis 4:7: "Your turning (*conversio*) will be toward your husband and he will have dominion over you (*ipse tui dominabitur*)." Augustine explains this verse as follows: "We should believe that even before sin, the woman was created precisely on such terms that the man would have

25. *Quaestiones in heptateuchum* 153.46,32–34 (CCSL 33.59,2011–2020).

26. *De civitate dei* 19.15 (CCSL 48.682,15,2–8).

27. *De civitate dei* 19.15 (CCSL 48.682,9–11).

28. *De civitate dei* 19.15 (CCSL 48.682,22–23).

dominion over her (*dominaretur*) and she would be turned to him in subjection (*serviando*). But the servitude signified here can rightly be understood as that which belongs to a certain status (*condicionis*) rather than to love (*dilectionis*),” since the kind of servitude by which human beings are subject to one another arose “from the penalty of sin.”²⁹ As recent scholars have emphasized, the type of prelapsarian hierarchy countenanced here lacks the aspects of oppressive domination and subjection characteristic of postlapsarian slavery, and connotes instead an amicable service motivated by love rather than coercion.³⁰ Consequently, although relationships of dominion existed before the fall, slavery as a personal status, a *condicio*, came about only as a result of sin.

In the *Questions on Genesis* Augustine further expounds this idea: “There is a natural order (*ordo naturalis*) among human beings such that women are subject to men (*serviant*) and children to parents, because there too this is justice, that the weaker reason should be subject to the stronger.”³¹ Subjection of this kind is natural, no less so than the command (*imperium*) which the mind exercises over the limbs of the body by moving them at its will.³² In book 19 of *City of God*, Augustine paraphrases a line of Scipio in Cicero’s *De re publica* and asserts that “the mind, in subjection to God, rightly issues commands to the body, and in the mind itself reason, subject to God the Master, rightly issues commands to lust and other vices.” Augustine concludes that clearly “slavery is useful for some, and to be enslaved to God is useful for all.”³³ Such was the subordination of Adam and Eve in paradise: “because their soul had received from the Master the body as a servant (*famulum*), so as the soul itself obeyed its Master the body should obey him and display without any resistance a service (*famulatum*) fitting for that life.”³⁴ By nature human beings are subject to God’s *dominium* because, as his creatures, they are rightfully his property. This natural rule of God over humanity is reflected in the natural rule of soul over body and reason over passions, and analogously in the rule of man over woman and parent over child. For Augustine, this chain of domination constitutes the linchpin of harmony and order in both individuals and society.³⁵

As already mentioned, Augustine sees sin as the cause of institutional slavery among human beings. But sin also perpetrates slavery of a different kind, namely subjection to sin’s domineering power and the concomitant bondage of the will.

29. *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.37.50 (PL 34.450).

30. So, most recently, McDaniel 2018: 64n.125. The same view was articulated already by Corcoran 1985: 62: “this relationship was very different from that introduced by sin to the institution of the family. Before the Fall, the relationship of service and domination was prompted by love and did not arise from an obligation imposed by status.”

31. *Quaestiones in heptateuchum* 153 (46,32–34) (CSEL 33.59,2027–2031).

32. Cf. *Confessiones* 8.9.21 (CCSL 27.126,9,6–8).

33. *De civitate dei* 19.21 (CSEL 48.688,47–689,2); cf. also 19.25 (CCSL 48.696,25,1–10).

34. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2.22.36 (CSEL 60.107,21–23).

35. Cf. *Sermo* 128.3.5 (PL 39.1098); *De moribus ecclesiae* 1.30.63 (CSEL 90.57,5–14). For the derivation of this organizing scheme from the structure of the Roman household and the *paterfamilias*, see Garnsey and Humfress 2001: 179.

This is penal servitude, a just punishment for man's disobedience: "The status (*condicio*) of slavery is to be understood as rightly imposed on the sinner."³⁶ In this connection Augustine often invokes the words of Jesus in John 8:34: "Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin."³⁷ No human being is exempt from the bondage of sin,³⁸ and this slavery is worse, according to Augustine, than institutional slavery: "Unquestionably the slave of man is better off than the slave of sin."³⁹ After the fall, human beings are enslaved to their lusts (*cupiditas*) and to false worship (*cultus idolorum*).⁴⁰ The proper dominion of reason over passions, and of God over man, is replaced by the ineluctable and domineering power of vices (*vitia*) and the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*). In the *Confessions* Augustine offers a classic description of this slavery of the will (*voluntas*), which is reinforced by habit.⁴¹ Unlike human *dominatio*, which ends with the death of the master, slavery to sin is permanent and inescapable.⁴² This slavery of the mind (*servitus animae*) is even more pernicious and detestable than the corporal servitude (*servitus corporis*) of institutional slavery.

However, slavery to sin is not merely a product of sinful actions forming habits that bind the will in invisible fetters. As Elm has recently emphasized, slavery is for Augustine a *condicio*, a personal status, which human beings derive from their *origo*, handed down to each new generation, passed on from fathers to sons. In effect, "Adam's disobedience... had sold man, though created free, into slavery to sin."⁴³ This condition of inherited bondage is encapsulated in the phrase *originale peccatum*, which Augustine used as early as 396/397⁴⁴ and which is prominent in his writings against Julian of Eclanum in the 420s. Augustine puts it strikingly in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (from around 416): "The infants whom you see being carried in their mothers' arms cannot yet walk, and yet they are already in fetters (*compediti*), for they derived (*traxerunt*) from Adam that which is broken up by Christ."⁴⁵ In short, human beings are spiritually shackled from birth, doomed to the slavery of sin.

LIBERATION AND REDEMPTION FROM THE CAPTIVITY OF SIN

Another metaphor akin to slavery is captivity (*captivitas*). Augustine often describes spiritual incapacity in terms of captivity to sin and/or Satan, and

36. *De civitate dei* 19.15 (CCSL 48.683,8–9).

37. See, e.g., *Sermo* 134.3.3 (PL 39.2010).

38. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.9 (CCSL 36.362,9,1–363,3).

39. *De civitate dei* 19.15 (CCSL 48.683,9–11). Cf. also *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.3 (CCSL 36.359,3,2–3).

40. *De vera religione* 38.69 (CCSL 32.232,38,1–233,22).

41. *Confessiones* 8.5.10 (CCSL 27.119,5,1–120,19). See also *De vera religione* 38.70–71 (CCSL 32.233,38,23–234,55).

42. *De vera religione* 55.111 (CCSL 32.258,81–92).

43. Elm 2018: 19.

44. Elm 2018: 16.

45. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.5 (CCSL 36.360,5,4–5).

figures salvation in terms of redemption (*redemptio*) from such captivity. It is easy to gloss over this familiar language, so long engrained in Christian theology, but to do so would be to miss the rich social, economic, and legal contours of Augustine's theological discourse. The twin concepts of captivity and redemption are bound up with and molded by the dynamics of chattel slavery, on the one hand, and barbarian captivity, on the other, and Augustine explicitly invokes these phenomena in discussing how Christ frees sinners from the domination of sin.⁴⁶

In order to see how Augustine constructs the metaphorical nexus of captivity and redemption, it is important to consider the existential realities of captivity in the late Roman empire, the connection between captivity and chattel slavery, and the legal strictures which governed the redemption of captives. Augustine's Letter 10*, a memorandum (*commonitorium*) written to his friend and associate Alypius, bishop of Thagaste, in Rome, presents us with a set of portraits of late antique captivity and liberation that are unmatched for their clarity and for the information they provide about the late Roman slave trade. In this letter Augustine describes the threat posed by slave-traders (*mangones*, possibly Galatian merchants)⁴⁷ who were ravaging the shores of Africa. Their despicable trade (*negotium*) had spawned a host of accomplices (*seducentium et depraedantium multitudo*) who forcibly seized or craftily lured unsuspecting persons into slavery to be sold across the sea.⁴⁸ Among their victims were many freeborn persons (*ingenui*), particularly those of uncertain status like tenants (*coloni*) and their children, or those who for whatever reason could not easily prove their freeborn condition.⁴⁹ Augustine recounts several anecdotes of the incursions of these thugs (*praedones*) dressed in military or barbarian garb, and recounts how many of their victims were freed "through the Church" (*per nostram ecclesiam*, a repeated phrase in this letter) from their wretched captivity (*ex illa miserabili captivitate*).⁵⁰

In a powerful sentence, Augustine laments that Africa is being emptied out of its native inhabitants (*suis ... evacuetur indigenis*) as if by a continuous stream, with the result that "so great a multitude of persons of both sexes are losing their personal liberty in a worse way than through captivity to the barbarians (*peius quam captivitate barbarica*)."⁵¹ Augustine adds by way of explanation that "many people are redeemed (*redimuntur*) from the barbarians," but captives transported overseas have no hope of such redemption. Moreover, although a vigorous and prosperous army can resist the barbarians and thus preserve Roman citizens from the threat of *babarica captivitas*, no one ventures to resist the *mangones* "in the

46. More study needs to be done on Augustine's use of *redemptio*. Ayres 2012 offers one overview.

47. Lepelley 1982; Rougé 1983: 185; Harper 2013: 85.

48. *Ep.* 10*.2, in Amadei et al. 1987: 168,30–41 [hereafter Divjak]; cf. *Ep.* 10*.2 (Divjak 174,92–93); *per ecclesiam ab eis homines liberantur*; *Ep.* 10*.2 (Divjak 180,167): *per ecclesiam liberavit*.

49. See Augustine's intriguing comments on the *condicio* of *coloni* in *De civitate dei* 10.1.2.

50. *Ep.* 10*.3 (Divjak 170,51–52).

51. *Ep.* 10*.5 (Divjak 174,106–109).

name of Roman liberty.”⁵² Augustine goes on to describe how the church of Hippo freed one hundred and twenty persons who were about to be transported as slaves to provinces across the sea. Though he does not say so explicitly, it seems likely that a ransom of some kind was paid to the *mangones* in exchange for the liberation of these captives. All of the cases described in Letter 10* revolve around what Augustine refers to in another letter from this dossier, Letter 24*, as *condicio hominum temporalis*—the personal status of human beings in this temporal world.⁵³ Whether or not we accept Augustine’s claim that he was absent when these events transpired, the evocative detail of Letter 10* establishes beyond doubt that Augustine was personally involved in the thorny issues of enslavement and the liberation and ransom of captives.

Divjak dated Letter 10* to 422/423, but more recent scholarship has tended to settle on a later date of 427/428. As Elm has argued, this new dating has important ramifications for the interpretation of the letter, for by the late 420s the Vandals were moving closer to North Africa and disrupting the trade routes between Africa and Constantinople, thereby increasing the threat of barbarian captivity and bringing slave traffickers closer to Hippo Regius.⁵⁴ Augustine’s poignant evocation of barbarian captivity in Letter 10* should be seen against this background. After the sack of Rome in 410, Alaric and the Visigoths had captured and enslaved Galla Placidia, daughter of emperor Theodosius I. She spent the next six years in slavery, moving with the Visigoths to Gaul and marrying Atalf, successor of Alaric, before her release was finally secured. In the decades that followed, captivity to the barbarians became a commonplace phenomenon in Rome’s Danubian provinces. Noel Lenski has shown that “the Age of Attila saw a tremendous increase in captivity and enslavement, which had a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and on the fate of the Roman Empire.”⁵⁵ Already in the 420s, well before Attila, barbarian captivity was an existential reality in Roman North Africa.

As William Buckland pointed out in *The Roman Law of Slavery*, as the Divjak letters attest, and as Lenski has recently emphasized, Christian churches under the empire were closely involved with the redemption of captives and established funds for this purpose.⁵⁶ The ransoming of captives (*redemptio*) was a well-articulated concept in Roman law, and can be sketched briefly in outline. Once the ransomer (*redemptor*) paid a ransom in money, he had a lien on the former captive. If he did not pay a ransom, the captive was merely liberated rather than ransomed, and recovered his former status.⁵⁷ So long he remained under the lien, the released

52. *Ep.* 10*.5 (Divjak 176,110–121).

53. *Ep.* 24*.1 (Divjak 382,11–14).

54. Elm 2018: 6–7.

55. Lenski 2015: 231; see also Lenski 2011.

56. Buckland 1994: 311. For details about the involvement of the church in ransoming captives in the fifth century: Lenski 2015: 241–43.

57. Buckland 1994: 311–12. Honorius by a decree of 408 imposed strict penalties on those who detained captives on whom there was no lien (314).

captive was not enslaved to his *redemptor*, properly speaking. However, as he did not yet formally possess *postliminium* (the legal right of regaining one's civic rights after being freed from captivity), he was in a "state of pledge," a sort of intermediate condition between slavery and freedom.⁵⁸ Consequently, "when the lien is ended the old status is restored: the man is not a *libertus* and owes no *obsequium* to the *redemptor*."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the act of buying back the captive was a purchase (*emptio*) in legal terms; and if the redeemed captive was a slave, "the redeemer became ... his owner, in a limited sense."⁶⁰ It is not clear from the legal codes what services a *redemptor* could exact from a freeborn person (*ingenuus*) who was redeemed, and whatever service he claimed was *ex re sua* and *ex operis servi*, hence not a result of possession in the strict sense. Such is the tenor of most of the evidence. Tryphoninus, however, speaks of a certain constitution (not securely identified) by which a redeemed captive became the slave of his ransomer.⁶¹

Against the background of the efforts of the Hippo church to rescue freeborn victims of slave traffickers, the growing incidence of barbarian captivity, and the legal laws governing the redemption of captives, Augustine's theological appropriation of the slavery and captivity metaphors takes on additional meaning. A few pregnant passages will serve to illustrate how the laws and practices surrounding captivity and redemption shaped Augustine's reflections on what it means to be a captive of sin and what it means to be liberated by Christ. In Sermon 134, preached around 417,⁶² Augustine vividly evoked the contemporary reality of captivity as he underlined the idea that everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34):

A freeborn person (*ingenuus*) is captured by the barbarians, and from being freeborn becomes a slave (*servus*). Someone hears and takes pity; he reflects that he has the money; he becomes the redeemer (*fit redemptor*), goes to the barbarians, gives money, redeems (*redemit*) the person. Clearly he has restored his liberty, if he has taken away his iniquity. But who has taken away iniquity? One human being from another? That man who was enslaved among the barbarians was redeemed by his redeemer, and there is a great difference between redeemer and redeemed; yet perhaps they are co-slaves (*conservi*) under the same mistress (*domina*), iniquity.⁶³

58. Buckland 1994: 312.

59. Buckland 1994: 312. See *Cod. Iust.* 8.50.11: *Si liberum captum te ab hostibus commercio redemit sabinus et eum vinculum pignoris superstitem remisisse tibi probetur, non libertus effectus, sed ingenuitati quam amiseras restitutus nullum filiis eius obsequium debes* (text in Frier 2016). On *obsequium*, see below, p.214.

60. Buckland 1994: 313.

61. *Digest* 49.15.12.7–8, discussed in Buckland 1994: 315.

62. Hill 1992: 341n.1.

63. *Sermo* 134.3.3 (PL 38.744).

In these words, spoken roughly one year after the release of Galla Placidia, Augustine describes a scene that would certainly have been familiar to his African congregants: the payment of a ransom price for the release of a freeborn captive reduced to a servile condition. It is hard to mistake the clear parallels with Letter 10*, written roughly a decade later. Augustine uses this powerful image to reconfigure his audience's understanding of freedom and captivity. The Roman mind easily perceives the difference between the redeemer, who retains his civic rights and personal liberty (*propria libertas*) unimpaired, and the redeemed, who despite his freeborn status is held against his will and suffers the impairment of his liberty. But despite this difference, Augustine asserts, both parties may be captives in a spiritual sense, shackled in bonds that are more pernicious—though less apparent—than physical fetters.

As the sermon progresses, Augustine intertwines the metaphor of slavery with the metaphor of captivity. From one angle, the sinner is a slave to sin; seen in a different light, he is a captive of the devil, who vaunts over his mortal flesh. Using the rhetorical figure of *prosopopeia*, Augustine addresses the devil as though present: “You slew the innocent one; you did away with the one you had no right to: give back those you were holding in your grasp.”⁶⁴ This calls forth a prayer: “Come, Master; come, Redeemer, come; let the captive recognize you, the captor flee from you; be my Liberator.”⁶⁵ Just as the Roman ransomer had to pay a price in gold to obtain a lien on the captive, so the heavenly Liberator offered his blood as the ransom-price.⁶⁶ As a result, the captor no longer has a claim to his prey. So Augustine concludes, “He will make us free; that is, he will liberate us—not from barbarians, but from the devil; not from captivity of the body, but from iniquity of the mind.”⁶⁷

The same linkage between captivity to barbarians and captivity to the devil comes out in a sermon on Psalm 84 that Augustine preached in Carthage. Explaining the verse “You have turned away the captivity of Jacob,” Augustine remarks, “None of us, I think, is presently among the barbarians, nor has any armed nation invaded and led us off as captives (*captivos*). Nevertheless, I will now show the captivity (*captivitatem*) in which we groan and from which we long to be freed.”⁶⁸ Augustine then turns to a favorite passage of his, Paul's lament in Romans 7 about the “law of sin” which “wages war against the law of my mind and brings me into captivity (αἰχμαλωτίζοντα) to the law of sin which is in my members.”⁶⁹ This chapter is a *locus classicus* for Paul's notion of slavery to sin, and Augustine

64. *Sermo* 134.5.6 (PL 38.745).

65. *Sermo* 134.3.4 (PL 38.744). For the theme of Christ as Liberator, see also *De moribus ecclesiae* 2.11.22 (CSEL 90.108,15–22); *De utilitate credendi* 1.3.8 (CSEL 46.10,21–12,8).

66. *Sermo* 134.4.5 (PL 38.745).

67. *Sermo* 134.4.5 (PL 38.745).

68. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 84.4 (CCSL 39.1164).

69. Romans 7:23: βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου.

quoted it often in the context of slavery and liberation.⁷⁰ Such internal captivity, the subjection of the mind (*mens*) to the lusts of the flesh, was precisely what the Psalmist meant by “the captivity of Jacob.” Augustine concluded, “You have turned away our captivity, not by freeing us from the barbarians, whom we have not run into, but by freeing us from wicked works, from our sins, through which Satan was exercising dominion over us (*dominabatur*).”⁷¹ Sin not only brings the sinner into slavery but also gives the devil a foothold for bringing him into captivity.

Augustine’s *Tractates on John* 41, written shortly after 416,⁷² further develop the metaphor of slavery to sin, again with vivid reference to contemporary issues about freeborn status and redemption. We have seen in Letter 10* the role played by the church in liberating those who were unjustly held as slaves; and, as noted above, the right of *episcopalis audientia* meant that Augustine was frequently tasked with adjudicating *liberales causae*. The bishop invokes these procedures as he explains,

Many people, when suffering from wicked masters, try to get themselves sold (*venales se petunt*), not seeking to be without a master, but only to change masters. But what can the slave of sin do? To whom can he make his demand (*quem interpellat*)? To whom can he apply for redress (*apud quem interpellat*)? Whom can he ask to get him sold? ... Sometimes people flee to the Church, and in general we put up with them even though they are uninstructed, desiring to be free from masters though they are unwilling to be free from sins. Sometimes even those who are subjected to an unlawful and wicked yoke flee to the Church because, though freeborn (*ingenui*), they are being held as slaves. Appeal for redress is made to the bishop (*interpellatur*), and if he does not make every effort that the freeborn condition not be violated, he is considered unmerciful. Let us all flee to Christ; let us call on God the Liberator for redress against sin (*contra peccatum Deum liberatorem interpellamus*); let us try to get ourselves sold, so that we may be redeemed by his blood.⁷³

This passage presents a clear example of how the contemporary realities of captivity and *liberales causae* shaped Augustine’s thought and discourse about sin and salvation. Augustine casts his congregants as freeborn citizens unjustly held in the *condicio* of slavery. By the natural order (*ordo naturalis*), they should be willingly subject to the *dominium* of God in a relationship of love rather than fear, but sin has brought them into captivity. Like the men and women who took legal recourse to the bishop in order to recover their freeborn status (*ingenuitas*), slaves of sin

70. See, for instance, *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.11 (CCSL 36.364,11,1–10).

71. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 84.4 (CCSL 39.1164).

72. For details about the dating, see the introduction to Rettig 1993.

73. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.4 (CCSL 36.359,4,7–360,26).

must appeal to God, who has ultimate jurisdiction over the human person. God then becomes the Redeemer who interposes his blood as the price (*pretium*) in order to ransom those who are enslaved. No monetary exchange is involved: this is a redemption “without money,” *sine argento*.⁷⁴ Once again, Augustine seeks to reconfigure his audience’s understanding of slavery and captivity by transferring these metaphors to the plane of the Christian’s relationship to God.

As noted above, a liberated captive owed certain obligations to the *redemptor*, including his labor. Accordingly, he was obligated to follow his redeemer and to show proper gratitude. In Sermon 198, Augustine refers to this legal convention in exhorting his congregants to a life of holy separation: “But if you mingle with the pagans, you are unwilling to follow the one who redeemed you; and you mingle with the Gentiles in life, in actions, in heart, by believing and hoping and loving such things; you are ungrateful to your Redeemer (*ingratus es Redemptori tuo*).”⁷⁵ Having been redeemed, the slave is now obligated to obey the directions of the one who ransomed him: “Do not be ungrateful to your Redeemer by not believing what he has promised; but do what he commands, so you may receive what he has promised.”⁷⁶ Elsewhere Augustine evokes this aspect of redemption when he says,

Let the Christian not declare, “I am free; I have been summoned into freedom. I used to be a slave, but I have been redeemed and by that very redemption I have become free; I will do what I want; let no one hinder me from exercising my will (*voluntas*), if I am free.” But if you use that will to commit sin, you are a slave of sin.... For your will will be free if it is dutiful.⁷⁷

Augustine goes on to quote Romans 6:18: “Having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God (*δουλωθέντες*).” The liberated captive occupies an intermediate status between slavery and freedom, for he owes service to his redeemer. This status of slavery-within-freedom will be the theme of the final section of this essay.

THE DUTIES OF THE FREEDMAN BOUND TO HIS MASTER

Augustine consistently describes the status of the freed Christian in terms of both slavery and freedom. This may seem paradoxical, given the stark polarity between slavery and freedom that we find in legal texts like Gaius’ *Institutes*.⁷⁸ But Moses Finley pointed out long ago that the sharp dichotomy between slave and free

74. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.4 (CCSL 36.360,26–30).

75. *Sermo* 198.2 (PL 38.1024). With this passage compare also *Sermo* 329.2 and *Sermo* 83.5.6, on the ungrateful servant in Jesus’ parable of the talents.

76. *Sermo* 242A.3 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1:328) (411 AD).

77. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.12 (CCSL 36.361,27–32).

78. See Gai. *Inst.* 1.1–5.

in Roman law is hardly an accurate reflection of Roman practice.⁷⁹ Indeed, as Keith Hopkins has well summarized, “The Roman system of slavery, like the Greek, worked by adulterating slavery with some of the privileges which we normally associate with freedom (such as giving slaves the right to make contracts, and to receive wages and to save); on the other hand, the Romans often extended a slave’s servitude into the period when he had become legally free.”⁸⁰ This last point—the adulteration of freedom with servile obligations—is particularly useful for understanding Augustine’s characterization of the liberated Christian as simultaneously slave and free. Attention to the legal and social dynamics of Roman manumission, and the conditions under which it was achieved, may shed some light on this theme. I argue that Augustine’s conceptualization of the condition of the liberated Christian evokes the duties customarily owed by freedmen to their patrons, especially *operae* and *obsequium*.

As already shown, Augustine often uses precise economic terminology to describe the legal status of the Christian who has been redeemed (*redemptus*) from slavery to sin and to the lusts of the flesh. One metaphor that Augustine to describe this transition is that of manumission. While the metaphorical nexus of captivity and redemption figures the individual as a bondslave of sin and/or Satan, needing to be set free by a merciful redeemer, the metaphor of manumission implies that the individual was already a slave of God to begin with (that is, by virtue of being his creature, under his dominion). While the former metaphor figures God as Redeemer, the latter figures God as patron.

The most striking occurrence of this image comes in a sermon which Augustine preached in the Basilica of Cererina at Carthage, possibly in late 403 or early 404.⁸¹ Here Augustine vividly describes the state of the Christian in terms that explicitly invoke the Roman practice of manumission:

With the Master there is free slavery (*libera servitus*)—free slavery where it is not necessity (*necessitas*) that is enslaved, but love (*caritas*). . . . You are simultaneously both a slave and a free man: a slave, because you were created; a free man, because you are loved by the God who made you—or, rather, free because you love the one who made you. . . . You are a slave of the Master, you are a freedman of the Master. Do not try to be manumitted on terms that would let you depart from the house of your manumittor.⁸²

The phrase “you are a freedman of the Master” (*libertus es domini*) is a partial quotation of Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, a Romanized city with a large slave market. In 1 Corinthians 7:21–22 Paul writes, “Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail

79. See Finley 1963–1964: 233–49.

80. Hopkins 1978: 131.

81. Boulding 2013: 13 with n.1.

82. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 99.7 (CCSL 39.1397,7,12–20). My rendering seeks to capture the conditional force of the *sic/ut* correlatives in the last sentence, for which see, e.g., Gildersleeve and Lodge 552n.3.

yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave (δοῦλος) is a freedman of the Lord (ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου).⁸³ Likewise, he who was free when called is a slave of Christ” (ESV). This text is a *locus classicus* for Paul’s theological conception of slavery, and (as Chris de Wet has recently noted) “is littered with grammatical, syntactical, and semantic ambiguities.”⁸⁴ Leaving aside the vexed problem of the phrase μάλλον χρῆσαι in verse 21, the interesting point to note here is Paul’s suggestion that slaves of Christ, whether slaveholders or slaves, are also *emancipated* slaves (freedmen) of God—an idea which Augustine picks up and expounds in terms of the Roman practice of manumission. The Christian, manumitted from slavery by God, is still required to remain (*manere*) and serve (*servire*) in the house of his patron. He is thus simultaneously in a state of freedom and of slavery. Augustine articulates the same idea in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* when he enjoins, “Remain in the slavery of God and in the liberty of Christ: serve (*servi*) the law of your God with your mind.”⁸⁵

Augustine thus conjures up an intermediate state between freedom and slavery: “in a way that is marvellous and ineffable yet true, we can be non-slave slaves,” *servi non servi*.⁸⁶ God the manumitter retains his freedmen in his service; they are bound to serve in love. The freedom they enjoy cannot be absolute: “Partly freedom, partly slavery: not yet total, not yet unalloyed, not yet full freedom, because eternity is not yet. For in part we have weakness, in part we have received freedom.”⁸⁷ Manumission carries with it a new kind of subjection.⁸⁸ Instead of being a slave to lust, the Christian is now a slave to love. Augustine explains this point with reference to John 8:35: “The slave does not remain in the house forever (*in aeternum*), but the son does remain in the house forever.” Augustine explains that “the church is the house (*domus*), the slave is the sinner.”⁸⁹ The picture sketched here closely parallels Augustine’s statement in Sermon 21 (quoted at the outset of this paper) about the Christian being a slave in the house of God. Liberated from sin, the Christian remains in God’s house, but in a new relationship of servitude to God—a servitude motivated not by fear but by love. As Augustine puts it, “This is what we hope for, brothers: to be freed by one who is free, that he by freeing us may make us slaves. For we used to be slaves of lust (*cupiditas*), but once we have been freed (*liberati*), we become slaves of love (*caritas*).”⁹⁰ The Christian is freed in one sense, but enslaved in another: free from the domineering

83. The Latin version of the relevant text which Augustine cites in *De scriptura sacra speculum* (a moral handbook compiled from Biblical sources), at sect. 349, reads: *Qui enim in Domino vocatus est servus, libertus est Domini: similiter qui liber vocatus est, servus est Christi*. This quotation, I think, effectively establishes the connection between Augustine’s *enarratio* of 403/404 and 1 Corinthians 7:22.

84. De Wet 2015: 65, with relevant bibliography at n.55. See also de Wet 2010.

85. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.12 (CCSL 36.364,3–5).

86. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 85.3 (CCSL 36.540,23–29). This paradox has not received much scholarly attention. A passing notice: Hezser 2005: 336.

87. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.10 (CCSL 36.363,15–19).

88. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 103.3.9 (CCSL 40.1507,14,50–52): *Quos liberos fecerat, servos fecit: non conditione, sed tamen Christi redemptione*.

89. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.8 (CCSL 36.361,8,4–5).

90. *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 41.8 (CCSL 36.361,8,22–23).

power of sin, but subject to the sweeter mastery of God, in a relationship characterized by mutual affection and even friendship.

What made manumission a suitable vehicle for conveying the Christian's state of slavery-within-freedom? To understand the resonance of this metaphor, it is helpful to survey the laws and practice surrounding the manumission of slaves in the later Roman empire. Manumission was a common procedure in the Roman world, especially after Constantine endowed bishops with the authority to manumit slaves and guarantee them Roman citizenship.⁹¹ The frequency of manumission may seem surprising, but it provided a number of advantages to slaveowners, both economic and non-economic. For one, the prospect of manumission furnished an incentive for slaves to be pliant and obedient over a long period of service.⁹² In addition, slave-owners could manumit their slaves as "an ostentatious token of their wealth and power."⁹³ In some cases, manumission might also be motivated by emotional or biological connection with a slave.⁹⁴

In the classical world, a manumitted slave could never fully escape his former servile status: his erstwhile condition remained "innate to his person," and he was permanently marked, physically and socially, by his having been the property of another human being.⁹⁵ Once manumitted, a freedman was no longer under the legal control (*potestas*) of his master; however, his master became his patron and retained certain claims upon him. Under Greek law, slaves were often freed conditionally via a *paramonē* contract (well documented in a remarkable set of Delphic inscriptions) which deferred manumission until after the death of the master and/or the performance of stipulated duties.⁹⁶ In the Roman world, where such testamentary manumission was also known, the ex-slave (*libertus* or *libertinus*) customarily owed his former master—now his patron—a host of formal and informal obligations.⁹⁷ As Hopkins summarizes, "the ex-slave was expected to be at his patron's service until his death, and when he died at his children's; he was generally precluded from doing anything to put his former master in disrepute (for example, by suing him at law); and he was expected to help maintain his former master if he fell on hard times."⁹⁸ Chief among the ex-slave's obligations were specified labor requirements known as *operae*. Often the freedman agreed to work for his patron on a fixed number of days per week.⁹⁹ Such labor naturally took place at the

91. The evidence for these laws is canvassed by Harries 2012: 161.

92. On manumission as incentivization, the classic study is Hopkins 1978: 133–71; see also, e.g., Bradley 1987: 81–112 and Mouritsen 2011: 40–45. For the importance of manumission as a culturally powerful belief, see Wiedemann 1985.

93. Hopkins 1978: 128.

94. Harper 2013: 241.

95. Mouritsen 2011: 44.

96. On *paramonē* contracts, see the fine study of Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005: 222–48.

97. On the *operae* of ex-slaves, see Treggiari 1969: 68–80; Waldstein 1986; Harper 2013: 241.

98. Hopkins 1978: 129; cf. MacLean 2018: 3. Still useful on this subject is the survey of Kaser 1938.

99. Cf. *Digest* 38.1.3–5, in Mommsen et al. 1985: 3:321 [hereafter Watson]. Translations of the *Digest* are Watson's.

patron's place of residence, presumably his *domus*.¹⁰⁰ In addition to these specified *operae*, an ex-slave who had worked as a craftsman was required to exercise his craft for the benefit of his patron and/or of a third party specified by the patron, including but not limited to the patron's heirs.¹⁰¹ According to the jurist Paul, the freedman's services were to be "assessed in accordance with the age, status, health, need, way of life, and other such considerations in respect of either party."¹⁰² The patron could also require certain gifts (*munera*) to be given to him by his ex-slave. (At times patrons evidently abused this power and imposed overly severe obligations "to repay the enormous privilege conferred on freedmen when they are brought out of slavery to Roman *civitas*."¹⁰³) To all of these obligations the ex-slave was bound by oath,¹⁰⁴ and they were enforceable by civil action—although allowances were made for extraordinary circumstances like illness,¹⁰⁵ and annulment was possible in rare cases.¹⁰⁶ Failure to meet these obligations could lead to a charge of *ingratia* against the ex-slave, and accusations of this kind are mentioned repeatedly in Justinian's *Digest*.¹⁰⁷

The most general obligations of the ex-slave to his patron were those of *obsequium*¹⁰⁸ and *reverentia*. *Obsequium* is often translated as "respect," but is hard to define precisely. As Francis Lyall explains, "it consists of a variety of elements, and the duty of respectful conduct on the part of the freedman towards his patron showed itself in many specific rules."¹⁰⁹ The ex-slave was debarred from any action that would diminish the prestige of his patron: he could not bring a lawsuit against the patron without a magistrate's consent, nor could he raise an action involving *infamia*. The general obligation of *obsequium* also underwrote some of the specific obligations mentioned above, such as providing financial or other forms of assistance to a patron in need (and possibly to his children).¹¹⁰

The strictures and conventions governing the relationship between patrons and freedmen, together with the metaphor of the redeemed captive described above, provide the social-conceptual groundwork, I argue, for Augustine's notion

100. *Digest* 38.1.21 (Javolenus, Cassius, book 6): *Operae enim loco edi debent ubi patronus moratur, sumptu scilicet et vectura patroni* (Watson 3:323).

101. The patron: *Digest* 38.1.9 (Watson 3:322); 38.1.23 (Watson 3:324); 38.1.38 (Watson 3:326); third parties: *Digest* 38.1.9–10 (Watson 3:322); heirs: *Digest* 38.1.16 (Watson 3:323). Distinction between *operae* and artistic or artisanal service: *Digest* 38.1.23 (Watson 3:324).

102. *Digest* 38.1.16.1 (Watson 3:323). On status appropriateness see also 38.1.17 (Watson 3:323); 38.1.38.1 (Watson 3:326).

103. *Digest* 38.2.1 (Watson 3:327).

104. *Digest* 37.15.10 (Watson 3:320); 38.1.10 (Watson 3:322).

105. *Digest* 38.1.15 (Watson 3:323); 38.1.34 (Watson 3:325).

106. Lyall 1984: 44.

107. See, for example, *Digest* 37.15.3 and 37.15.4 (Watson 3:319).

108. *Digest* 38.2.1.1 (Watson 3:327), *nisi ei obsequium praeestaret libertus*. See also *Cod. Iust.* 1.3.16 (409 AD): *ruralibus obsequiis quo maluerit subrogato fungatur*; 1.12.6.9: *ne patronis seu dominis per ipsorum ab sentiam obsequia iusta denegentur* (adduced by Gascoy 2008: 145).

109. Lyall 1984: 43.

110. For the obligation of support: *Digest* 25.3.5.19–20 (Watson 2:739).

of the Christian's dual status as slave and free, and helps to explain his injunction, "Do not try to be manumitted on terms that would let you depart from the house of your manumittor." One way to see how the legal obligation of ex-slaves informs Augustine's thinking about Christian freedom is to trace the lexicon of *obsequium* and *ingratia* in Augustine's corpus.

Obsequium is a common word in Augustine with many shades of meaning. It can refer, for instance, to the proper subjection of woman to man; to God the Son's obedience to God the Father; or to ordinary human hospitality. But viewed through the lens of slavery and freedom, Augustine's use of *obsequium* can sometimes be seen to evoke the "dutiful respect" owed by the ex-slave to his patron.¹¹¹ In Sermon 296, delivered in 411 shortly after the Goths' devastating sack of Rome, Augustine addresses the question of why people suffer (and why Rome suffers). He urges his listeners not to be impertinent slaves who constantly ask the reason for their master's decisions:

For now, submit yourself to the will of your God, the Master: once you have become his friend, you will know the plans of your God, the Master. What slave is so arrogant that, when the Master orders him to do something, he says "Why"? The Master keeps his plans to himself. They become clear if he does his duty (*obsequium profecerit*), if he does well, if from being a slave he becomes a friend, as the Master himself said: "I will no longer call you slaves, but friends."¹¹²

The theme of friendship is common in Augustine's description of slavery to God. The prospect of a bond of friendship between slave and master, in which the (ex-) slave renders his due service and respect (*obsequium*) and the master makes him privy to his plans, suggests the picture of a loyal freedman rendering honor to his patron and receiving benefits in return. As Henrik Mouritsen observes, "The Roman elite were not just surprisingly close to their freedmen, they also invested a remarkable degree of confidence in them," including the exchange of personal information.¹¹³ The classical world offers us examples of such intimate relationships between freedmen and patrons in a *familia*—most famously Cicero's secretary Tiro, whose relationship with his former master (to judge, at least, from Cicero's letters) was marked by mutual honor and affection.

While Augustine's use of *obsequium* in the context of slavery and manumission is relatively scarce, his appropriation of *ingratia* language is frequent and is, I suggest, unmistakably shaped by the legal connotations of the term. *Ingratia* was a formal charge that could be brought against a manumitted slave who failed to honor his patron properly, behaved insolently toward him, or committed an action

111. For this translation of *obsequium*: Mouritsen 2011: 61.

112. *Sermo* 296.7 (*PL* 38.1352).

113. Mouritsen 2011: 46; and see 56–58 for freedmen as confidential links in Roman elite networks of communication.

which positively harmed the patron or his household. Such offenses by a *servus ingratus* could result in severe punishments and potentially even reenslavement, in the most egregious cases.¹¹⁴ At the outset of *City of God*, when Augustine reproaches his Roman readers for being ungrateful (*ingrati*) for the benefits (*beneficiis*) of God who as a redeemer (*redemptoris*) delivered them from the marauding Goths, there is a tacit evocation of the duties owed to a patron or redeemer, an insinuation reinforced in Book 2 where Augustine remarks on the ingratitude (*ingrata*) of the Roman state toward several of the exemplary paragons of virtue, such as Camillus, who liberated (*liberaverat*) their country in times of war.¹¹⁵

Even more revealing is Augustine's exposition of *ingratia* in an explicitly theological vein in his sermon on Psalm 134, where he expounds the verse "Praise the name of the Master; praise the Master, O you slaves who stand in the house of the Master." Here Augustine evokes the possibility of a *servus ingratus* who, after being freed, fails to praise his master.¹¹⁶ Those who "stand" in the house of the Master, he explains, are those who keep his precepts and offer their service with genuine affection (*caritate sincera servient Deo*).¹¹⁷ Augustine exhorts,

Be grateful; you used to be outside, and [now] you are standing inside. ... Is this a small benefit (*beneficium*), that we stand in the house of the Master? ... Shouldn't we consider the fact that all the wicked were not seeking the Master, and yet he himself sought them who were not seeking him, and after finding them he lifted them up, and after lifting them up he summoned them and after summoning them he brought them in and made them to stand in his house? Whoever considers this and is not ungrateful (*ingratus*) ... , because he does not have anything to pay back to God in exchange for such great benefits (*beneficiis*), what option does he have except to give thanks, not to repay?¹¹⁸

Again, Augustine deploys the social logic of manumission in a way that serves to inscribe his audience in a condition that is neither purely servile nor purely free, but paradoxically both. The benefit they have received in being brought into their Master's house obliges them to render service in return as his slaves. "Even if you were *only* slaves," Augustine explains, "you would be obliged to praise your Master: how much more ought you to praise your Master as slaves (*servi*), so that you may deserve to praise him *also* as sons (*et filii*)."¹¹⁹ The adverbial *et*, so unobtrusive as almost to escape attention, encapsulates and condenses the counterintuitive dynamics of Augustine's soteriology, where the son is always, also, and indeed

114. Mouritsen 2011: 62–63.

115. *De civitate dei* 1.1,34, 2.17.

116. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 134.1.1 (CCSL 40.1937,1,1–1938,33).

117. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 134.2.2 (CCSL 40.1938,2,13–17).

118. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 134.2.2 (CCSL 40.1938,2,18–1939,37).

119. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 134.1.1 (CCSL 40.1938,25–33).

first, a slave.¹²⁰ Such a dynamic both mirrored and drew its force from the complexity of free and servile status in a world where freedmen found themselves in a similarly paradoxical situation of freedom adulterated with servitude, wherein their “previous ownership was replaced by a new bond based on debt and gratitude for the ‘beneficium’ of freedom.”¹²¹

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has highlighted some of the ways in which Augustine’s discourse about slavery to sin, liberation from captivity, and slavery to God constantly invokes, and derives its meaning from, the social, economic, and legal dimensions of servitude, captivity, and manumission in the late Roman empire. The concept of *dominium* underwrites Augustine’s description of the prelapsarian *ordo naturalis* as a chain of relationships of subordination between God and man, soul and body, male and female. The notion that human beings are enslaved to sin, subject to the *condicio servitutis* from birth, evokes the reality of *coloni* bound to the land through their *origo*. Moreover, Augustine’s description of captivity to the devil and liberation through the *interpellatio* of God the Redeemer is informed by the contemporary reality of barbarian captivity and of *liberales causae*, so richly described in Letter 10*. Finally, Augustine’s characterization of Christian service in terms of a state of simultaneous freedom and servitude draws on the legal norms governing the relationship of freed captives to their redeemers as well as the obligations of *obsequium* and *gratia* which ex-slaves owed to their patrons.

Close consideration of these social contexts opens the way to a more culturally situated appraisal of slavery, redemption, and liberation as conceptual metaphors in the later Roman empire. In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson revolutionized the study of metaphor by shifting attention from metaphors as rhetorical devices (a line of inquiry to which Augustine himself made fundamental contributions)¹²² to metaphors as ubiquitous schemata that constitute the way we conceptually organize and interpret our experience, structuring “the most fundamental concepts in the culture.”¹²³ In short, they proposed that metaphor

120. For the former slave’s position as potentially “close to that of a quasi-son,” see Mouritsen 2011: 37; see also Garnsey 1997.

121. Mouritsen 2011: 36.

122. Not least in his *De doctrina christiana*, which draws a fundamental distinction between *signa propria* and *signa translata* (2.10.15) and discusses at great length the figures of speech that occur in Scripture. *De doctrina* itself contains a few striking instances of the slavery metaphor, first in the context of astrology (2.21.32) and secondly in reproaching the Jews’ “carnal” (unspiritual) interpretation of the signs of divine revelation (3.5.9–3.6.10); but it is revealing that slavery and freedom as verbal metaphors are never an object of discussion in their own right. For Augustine’s appreciation of the metaphorical use of *liberare*, see n.9 above. Whether Augustine’s theory of language, grounded in the distinction of *res* and *signa*, may help to illuminate his deployment of slavery and freedom as conceptual metaphors is a question I do not pursue here.

123. Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 22.

is “as much a part of ordinary thought as it is a special feature of language.”¹²⁴ Amid the streams of multi-disciplinary research on metaphor unleashed over recent decades in the wake of this seminal work, scholars have rightly criticized Lakoff and Johnson’s experientialist approach for failing to take systematic appreciation of the indispensable role of culture in constituting metaphors.¹²⁵ More recent iterations of cognitive metaphor theory (CMT) have done much to redress this imbalance by highlighting some of the ways in which metaphors are inescapably embedded within particular physical and cultural contexts.¹²⁶ These theoretical developments have begun to change our readings of early Christian and late antique discourses about slavery; but the fact remains, as Marianne Bjelland Kartzow has recently pointed out, that “the complex tension between metaphor and social reality is undertheorized” when it comes to the place and function of “slavery in early Christian texts.”¹²⁷

Bjelland Kartzow herself rightly calls for us to “look at the interaction between body and culture, and at life stories and shared cultural knowledge for understanding how people conceptualized metaphors.” My reading of Augustine supports this impetus and suggests that we should extend it also to legal, juridical, and economic regimes. Due appreciation of these factors sheds a revealing light on the role of slavery and freedom in Augustine’s theology. No mere rhetorical embellishments of a theological edifice, these conceptual metaphors work to bring about a thoroughgoing redefinition of his parishioners’ identity, inscribing them in a very particular social and economic status—a *condicio*—in relation to God. Augustine’s paradoxical representation of the liberated Christian as both free and slave fundamentally depends upon the ambiguity of such statuses in the Roman world. From this ambiguity stems, too, the multifarious Augustinian parenthesis which oscillates between exhortations to rejoice in freedom (*libertas*), injunctions to a more devoted servility (*servitus*), and warnings against the ever-present specter of ingratitude (*ingratia*). Our understanding of Augustine’s conceptual world, and of his deployment of the language of slavery and freedom, is greatly enriched by careful

124. Gibbs 2017: 3, from the introduction of a volume which offers a wide-ranging and appreciative critique of the notion of the “conceptual metaphor” as it has evolved from 1980 to the present (largely in the context of cognitive linguistics and applied linguistics).

125. As Howe 2007: 15 points out, “despite frequent cursory nods toward cultural variation” by Lakoff and Johnson, “their explanatory schema for the origin and structuring of metaphor assigns to culture a distinctly secondary, even ancillary role, something with which to tie up loose ends not accounted for by the primary factors in their analysis.” For Lakoff and Johnson’s focus on universalizable experience as the basis of metaphor see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 19–21, 56–60.

126. For a helpful summary of these recent refinements, see Gibbs 2017: 14–15, 123. See, among others, Gibbs 1999, arguing for a “distributed view” of cognition on which “our understanding of what is conceptual about metaphor involves significant aspects of cultural experience, some of which is even intimately related to our embodied behavior,” so that “there need not be a rigid distinction between cultural and conceptual metaphor” (146); Quinn 1992, esp. 60: “metaphors, far from constituting understanding, are ordinarily selected to fit a preexisting and culturally shared model”; Deignan 2003.

127. Bjelland Kartzow 2018: 1.

attention to the social, economic, and legal realities which made such metaphors meaningful for both himself and his audience.

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