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Augustine beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality, and Reception

Edited by

Karla Pollmann

Meredith J. Gill



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THE RECEPTION OF AUGUSTINE IN ORTHODOX ICONOGRAPHY

Vladimir Cvetkovic

Historical Overview of Augustine in Orthodox Sources

The name of the bishop of Hippo appeared quite early in Greek sources. The Christian East acknowledged him as a Father of the Church and a major theologian during his lifetime. He was invited by Emperor Theodosius II to attend the Council of Ephesus (known as the Third Ecumenical Council) in 431,¹ but the invitation came too late to Carthage,² since Augustine had died in the previous year. Augustine's name is included in the list of the Fathers and teachers of the Universal Church at the next Ecumenical Council summoned by the Emperor Justinian in 553 which took place in Constantinople. Augustine is mentioned several times in the Chronicles of the Council. Thus, Emperor Justinian stated in the letter read in the Opening Session of the Council:

We further declare that we hold fast to the decrees of the four Councils, and in every way follow the holy Fathers, Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Theophilus, John (Chrysostom) of Constantinople, Cyril, Augustine, Proclus, Leo and their writings on the true faith.³

Augustine was undoubtedly recognized as a Father and teacher of both Greek- and Latin-speaking Christendom during the patristic era.

By the end of Carolingian rule in the ninth century, the reception of Augustine had dramatically changed in the consciousness of Latin Christians and, thanks to Augustine's original and wide-ranging writings, he gained supreme patristic authority in the West.⁴ However, Eastern, mainly Greek-speaking Christians did not have the same appreciation for

¹ Edward Schwartz, ed., 'Councilium Universale Ephesenum, Collectio Veronensis XVIII,' in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I/2 (Berolini, 1927), p. 64.

² Capreolus, *Epistula prima*, PL 53:845.

³ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), p. 303.

⁴ Michael Azkoul, *The Influence of Augustine of Hippo on the Orthodox Church* (Lewiston, NY, 1990), pp. 42–6; George C. Papadimitriou, 'Review of Azkoul, *The Influence of*

Augustine as their Western counterparts, and for at least two reasons. The first, and probably most crucial reason as to why Augustine's teachings were not appreciated by the Christian East is due to the fact that his writings were not available in Greek translation. There were not many Christians at that time, even among the learned, who could read Augustine in Latin. His writings were not translated into Greek until the thirteen century, when the monk Maximos Plenudes made Augustine accessible to the Byzantines.

The second reason is more a matter of the theological character of the Eastern tradition. In spite of some attempts within Byzantine society to proclaim one of the Fathers a supreme doctrinal authority, Orthodox theology generally remained immune to such tendencies. For example, the debate in Constantinople in the eleventh century over supreme patristic authority concluded with the establishment of the feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, instead of resulting in the proclamation of a Father of the Fathers. Byzantines also required that a theologian be not so much an independent, productive and original presence, but that he be more generally faithful to the authority of orthodox Christian dogma. Even if Augustine's work had been known in Byzantium, he would not have been able to claim a singular place among other Fathers of the Church.

Historical Evidence of the Iconography of Augustine

If the assertion holds that Byzantine iconographic tradition correlates with the mainstream of Byzantine theology, then one can conclude that iconographers appreciated Augustine in proportion to the place he gained in Eastern theological tradition. Unfortunately, due to the reasons mentioned above, the place of Augustine in Eastern Christian iconography does not correspond with the significance attributed to his work in the West, or to the appreciation that Renaissance painters had for him. By the fifteenth century, there were, therefore, just a few frescos of Augustine in the Christian East. The earliest preserved fresco of Augustine from the Lateran Library in Rome dates from the sixth century. The depiction of Augustine in front of a book and with a scroll in his hand evokes the

Augustine of Hippo on the Orthodox Church, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39:3-4 (1994), pp. 379-81, there 380.

identity of the saint as a Doctor of the Church. The depiction lacks, however, the significant theological elements of icons that were developed from the sixth to the tenth centuries in Byzantium and that represent the Byzantine iconographic canons.⁵

According to the definition of icons issued by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council,⁶ the term *icon* is not restricted only to panel icons but it also includes frescos, mosaics, manuscript illustrations, images woven into cloth, engraved on metal, or carved on ivory or wood.⁷ Thus, it is worth mentioning the seal from the second quarter of the seventh century that bears the engraved icon of Augustine. Vitalien Laurent, who published a study on this seal, catalogued in the Vatican museum (seal 92), claims that it is the second oldest depiction of Augustine, presumably after the one from the Lateran Library in Rome.⁸ It is obvious from the manner of Augustine's depiction that the image engraved on the seal had a devotional and intercessional purpose, because it possesses some theological elements that the fresco in the Lateran library lacks. While on the Lateran fresco Augustine is depicted as a scholar, more in the fashion of ancient philosophers than saintly bishops, the seal portrays Augustine as a bishop gazing at the viewer. The frontal view of Augustine's bust also reveals several details. First, contrary to the depiction of the book on the Lateran fresco which is opened and fairly detached from Augustine, the seal presents the book as closed and held by Augustine in his left arm closely to his torso. There is no doubt that this ornamented book held in such position is the book of the Gospels, which represents a symbol of his office as a bishop. Second, the inscription in Latin "SCAUGU.TI.S," that is "S(an)c(tus) Augu[s]ti[nu]s," confirms a) that the engraved image is not of an anonymous bishop, but of the Bishop Augustine and b) that the bishop of Hippo is considered a saint. Finally, a slightly debated feature of Augustine's depiction on the seal is what Laurent calls "une ancienne forme de la coiffure épiscopale,"⁹ while Daley considers to be "a soft cap," almost

⁵ The Byzantine iconographic canon includes the unwritten tradition passed from master to disciple about the technology of icons as well as theological precepts issued by the Council of Trullo (691–2) and the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787). See Georges Drobot, 'Icons: Lines, Language, Colours, and History,' in *Icons: Windows on Eternity*, ed. Gennadios Lemouris (Geneva, 1990), pp. 168–9.

⁶ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 13 (Paris, 1903), p. 377D.

⁷ Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), p. 195.

⁸ Vitalien Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médaillier Vatican* (Vatican City, 1962), p. 86.

⁹ Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médaillier Vatican* (see above, n. 8), p. 86.

in the fashion of Renaissance popes.¹⁰ Laurent's claim seems more likely, since the tonsure is the characteristic of ordination of Roman clergy. The inscription in Greek "[The seal of] Peter, ex consul, of patrician rank and general" on the other side of the seal allowed Laurent to gather the information about the origin and the owner of the seal and to date it properly. Laurent convincingly argues that the seal is engraved between the 630s and 640s in North Africa, when this territory was controlled by the Byzantine Exarchate of Carthage. According to Laurent, the seal belonged to Peter, who was the Exarch of Carthage and a spiritual disciple of the seventh-century saint and martyr Maximus the Confessor. Daley rightly remarks that the engraved image of Augustine on the official seal of the ruler of the North Africa could be the emblem of cultural adaptation,¹¹ but it could also be a symbol of courageous struggle against heresy so needed at the time of the monophysite imperial policy.

The first fresco of Augustine made in accordance with Byzantine iconographic canons dates from the twelfth century and is situated in Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily (fig. 1). The basilica was the legacy of the Norman King, Roger II, who commissioned the mosaics from Byzantine craftsmen. The mosaic itself is a masterpiece in both aesthetic and theological terms. The representation of Augustine, accompanied by two western Fathers and popes—Gregory the Great on his right and Sylvester on his left—is located on the south wall of the nave. A mosaic of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and Gregory the Theologian functions as a counterpart on the north wall of the nave. The symbolism expressive of equality among the Eastern and Western Fathers clearly reflects the development of Church dogma. However, while the depiction of the three Eastern Church Fathers together became an iconographic norm, the depiction of Augustine with Gregory the Great and Sylvester remains an isolated example. The peculiar detail is a form of Augustine's *pallium*. A *pallium* or *omophor* (from Greek ὠμοφόριον) is a broad band of white woollen cloth worn over the neck and shoulders by bishops as a symbol of their ecclesial and pastoral authority. The *pallia* symbolically represent the lost sheep carried by the bishop who is a type (τύπον)¹² and

¹⁰ Brian E. Daley, 'Making a Human Will Divine: Augustine and Maximus on Christ and Human Salvation,' in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George E. Damacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY, 2008), pp. 101–126, there 126.

¹¹ Daley, 'Making a Human Will Divine' (see above, n. 10), p. 126.

¹² Ignatius, *Magnessians* 4.1, in *Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Kirsopp Lake [vol. 1, Loeb], pp. 200–3.



Figure 1. The Cefalù cathedral master, St. Augustine of Hippo, mosaic, twelfth century, Cefalù cathedral, Cefalù, Sicily, Italy. [From the book Rose S., *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, California, 1996), p. 4]

in the place (τόπον)¹³ of Christ the Good Shepherd. In the Cefalù mosaic Augustine is presented with the imperial *pallium* (the oval *pallium* usually worn by Roman emperors from the time of Constantine) that could suggest his higher authority as compared to the other two Fathers and popes. However, this detail could also be a matter of the artist's inventive play with patterns; both Basil and Gregory, who flank John Chrysostom, are depicted with imperial *pallia* and all these elements together give an impression of symmetry.

In the book of Seraphime Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, it is stated either by the author or by the editor that a

¹³ Ignatius, *Trallians* 3.1, in *Apostolic Fathers* (see above, n. 12), pp. 214–5.

fresco of Augustine dating from the early sixteenth century can be found in the Monastery of Varlaam in Meteora, Greece and that it is the work of a highly praised iconographer¹⁴ from the Cretan or Italo-Cretan School, Theophanis Bathas-Strelitzas, better known as Theophanes the Cretan.¹⁵ This statement is additionally supplemented by the photograph of the alleged fresco of Augustine [fig. 2]. However, the information given is not only debatable, but also inaccurate. Varlaam Monastery was not frescoed by Theophanes the Cretan, but by Frangos Katelanos, who painted the nave of St. Varlaam sometimes before 1550, most probably in 1548.¹⁶

The suggestion that the depicted person is Augustine is quite surprising, because it has neither been considered by scholars, nor mentioned in the Greek written sources so far. It is worth asking what might have led Rose, or the editor of his book, to conclude that the saint at stake could be Augustine. One of the reasons for the depiction of Augustine could be the increasing western artistic tendencies in both content and style noticeable not only in the Cretan School, but also in the works of artists from other parts of Greece. Thus, Frangos Katelanos, having first-hand knowledge of western art due to his visits of Italy,¹⁷ might have decided to introduce Augustine in the post-Byzantine iconographic repertoire in the same way in which he depicted St. Sebastian, who entered the thematic repertoire of Orthodox iconography a few decades earlier at the same church of Varlaam.¹⁸ A second probable reason for identifying the saint as Augustine is the Roman tonsure (the top of the head shaved) of the depicted saint. However, what we perceive today as a Roman tonsure was not just a characteristic of the Roman clergy, but as an imitation of Christ's crown¹⁹

¹⁴ I will use the term iconographer in order to underline the difference between an iconographer or *zoographos* and an artist in the modern sense of the word. An iconographer is a person acting in a role between those of the modern artisan and artist. His or her creativity is restricted to the theological canon. Because iconography, like liturgy, belongs to the liturgical community, the iconographer acts much like a priest on their behalf.

¹⁵ Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, 1996), p. 24.

¹⁶ The date is inscribed on the south wall.

¹⁷ Miltiadis-Miltos Garidis, *La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450–1600) et dans les pays sous domination étrangère*, (Athens, 1989), p. 190.

¹⁸ Xanthi Proestaki, 'Saint Sebastian: The Martyr from Milan in Post-Byzantine Wall-Paintings of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and the Influences from Western Painting,' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 34/1 (2010), pp. 81–96.

¹⁹ Pseudo-Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Fragmentum commentarii liturgici* (PG 87:3985D). See also s.v. 'tonsure' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991), 3:2093.



Figure 2. Frangos Katelanos, St. John Kaloktenis?, fresco, 1548, The *katholikon* of Varlaam monastery, Meteora, Greece.

it was widespread in Byzantium too. Therefore, this reason is obviously not sufficient to conclude that the saint is in fact Augustine.

Georgios Fousteris, a Greek theologian and Byzantinist has recently suggested that the depicted saint could be the twelfth century bishop of Thebes, St. John Kaloktenis (Ioannou Kalokteni), and by depicting the Theban bishop, Frangos Katelanos, who is also from Thebes, wanted to pay homage to his great fellow citizen.²⁰

To rule out the possibility that Augustine is depicted in Varlaam does not mean to acknowledge that there was no other fresco of the western saint in the Orthodox iconographic tradition before the twentieth century. There seems to be a fresco of Augustine in Mount Athos, at the *katholikon* of the monastery of Pantokrator. It is difficult to determine the exact period of the first depiction of Augustine. The present fresco of Augustine was the work of the iconographer Mathaeos John of Naousa, who repainted the old layer of frescos in the nineteenth century (1854).²¹ The original decoration of the nave dates from the fourteenth century when the monastery was established, but it is highly unlikely that the fresco of Augustine featured in the original program. It is more likely that the fresco of Augustine was added sometime in the seventeenth century, and that the iconographer simply repainted it in order to preserve the original program. Such a suggestion is supported by the evidence of an inscription, where it is written that the "sacred temple, become gloomy with the passage of time, was restored to its original brightness."

The iconography of Augustine has flourished in modern times. From the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, when many Orthodox intellectuals found refuge in the West, an appreciation of the western Fathers who lived before the split of 1054 began to grow. Nowadays, there are many icons of Augustine that represent him either alone or in the company of another, usually Eastern, saint.

The Characteristics and Theological Significance of the Icon As a Medium

In order to understand how a depiction of Augustine contributes to his reception, it is important to emphasize the distinctive theological char-

²⁰ The finding of Dr. Fousteris is not published yet, and it was communicated in a private conversation.

²¹ The exact date of repainting and the name of the iconographer are written on the inscription, which is located over the lintel of the doorway leading from the nave into the light.

acteristics of the icon and its purpose for Christian congregations. The most important characteristic of icons is that they do not represent saintly figures in their historical and earthly lives but, rather, their place in the future Kingdom of God, where they are represented as resurrected and transfigured by divine grace. Saints are those who have gained the likeness of God and who, having obtained freedom and blessedness with God, can intercede on our behalf.²² Icons do not therefore represent the world as it is present around us or even as improved by artistic vision; rather, they give us a glimpse of the transformed world of the Kingdom of God which is already experienced by saints and testified by the Fathers of the Church.²³ Icons are not, therefore, a matter of artistic imagination, for they are evidence of the true experience of God on the part of holy men and women. Thus, the Seventh Ecumenical Council emphasized that icons are not the invention of artistic imagination but the work of the Holy Spirit through the Fathers.²⁴ Unfortunately, the immediate reception of this Council completely ignored this: since the late eighth century, many western Christians have perceived icons as a form of religious art, in which artists reconstruct the events from the time of Jesus and the early history of Christianity.²⁵

Fr. Stamatis Skliris rightly remarks that early icons of martyrs from the catacombs had two purposes.²⁶ The first purpose was to explain the importance of the liturgy, which is celebrated in the glory of a certain martyr. The second purpose of early icons was to represent martyrs in front of God in the Kingdom of Heaven, with halos around their heads as signs of holiness. The halo represents God the Father's confirmation that the saint is received in the Heavenly Kingdom; it is not a decorative but an ontological characteristic of the icon.²⁷ Icons play, then, a constitutive role in the liturgical gathering, but not as artefacts of religious art that enhance the devotions of Christians but, rather, as a revelation of the Kingdom of God. Orthodox iconographers have developed a specific artistic language

²² Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum* 13, 164D. See also Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the World: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 191–201.

²³ See Mariamna Fortounatto and Mary B. Cunningham, 'Theology of Icon,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 136–40, there 142.

²⁴ Liz James, '... and the Word was with God... What makes art Orthodox?', in *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 103–10, there 104.

²⁵ Léonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (New York, 1978), pp. 135–44.

²⁶ Stamatis Skliris, *In the Mirror* (Alhambra, Cal., 2007), p. 101.

²⁷ Reference to the saints' halos or crowns as "uncreated things" can be found very early in the Macarian homilies. See Macarius of Egypt, *Homily* 6.7, PG 34:524A.

in order to express very complex theological issues. By using exclusively artistic elements such as light, colour, form and perspective, they have found an appropriate way to articulate visually specific dogmatic themes that link the historical with the eschatological realm.

The Dialectics between Light and Design

Light is the essential element of the icon and it has priority over the outline of forms because it presents the saints and events in an eternal perspective. The outline made according to personal description (εικονισμός) preserves the likeness of the depicted image of the saint.²⁸ The combination of light and outline in compositions allows the iconographer to depict events and persons from the historical and temporal realms, but transfigured into the world-to-come. The light, often in yellow or gold, stresses the eschatological perspective, or the fact that the persons depicted appear not in their earthly state but as transfigured in the Kingdom of Heaven. Both elements have theological significance and it is very important, therefore, that the iconographer keep them in perfect balance in order to transmit the right message. An image that emerges from the sketch has the purpose of transmitting the likeness of the depicted person of a saint in his or her historical life. In a complementary fashion, the image gained through light and colours shows the true likeness of this person to Christ, or how the transformed saint will look in the life to come.²⁹

There are many accounts of uncreated light in the patristic sources. For instance, Symeon the New Theologian, states that his mystical experience of uncreated light commenced with “a flood of divine radiance from above.”³⁰ This supports Fr. Skliris’s thesis that, ontologically, the source of the light is not only external, as in the case of natural light, but also that its source is not within the boundaries of the created world.³¹ The light does not follow the laws of linear motion, and therefore the shades caused by this light differ from the shades created by natural light. Moreover, the shadows caused by the nose or the chin of a saint in an icon clearly

²⁸ For more on *eikonismos*, see Gilbert Dagron, ‘Holy Images and Likeness,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), pp. 23–33, there 25–28.

²⁹ See for more patristic evidence Liz James, ‘Color and Meaning in Byzantium,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11:2 (2003), pp. 223–33, there 225–6.

³⁰ Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses* (London, 1980), pp. 245–6.

³¹ Stamatias Skliris, *Likovni prostor u vizantijskoj ikonografiji* (Srbinje, 1998), pp. 40–3.

show that the source of light comes from outside, because if the source of light dwells solely within saints, then there would not be shadows on their faces. But due to the enormous distance of the light's source it illuminates the saints centrally, falling vertically on the surface of the icon and creating a centripetal lightening on each figure. Moreover, this light is not only free from the necessity of natural motion, but it also frees persons and objects from natural causality. Symeon also describes another mystical experience along those lines: "It [light] expelled from me all material denseness and bodily heaviness that made my members [bodily parts] to be sluggish and numb."³² Therefore an iconographer depicts the persons and objects illuminated by divine light as weightless.

It seems that Augustine's account of light, especially in *De Genesi ad litteram* (bk 1), only to a certain extent endorses the theology of light in the Byzantine and Orthodox tradition. The uncreated light as it is perceived in Orthodox tradition is not only a gift of divine grace but also a result of human choice and spiritual labour such as prayer, fasting, vigil and obedience. In many personal accounts of divine light, from Symeon the New Theologian³³ to Motovilov,³⁴ the appearance of divine light is a result of mediation³⁵ or a reward for ascetical deeds. Symeon the Pious (Eulabes) and Seraphime of Sarov deliberately carried their disciples Symeon the New Theologian and Nikolai Motovilov into the presence of God who is light. Symeon the New Theologian also testified that the second vision of the divine light that he experienced in his monastic maturity was a reward for his strict ascetical practice.³⁶ Therefore, Archbishop Basil Krivocheine rightly remarks that "what had been the free gift of grace and prayer became the fruit of a difficult and prolonged asceticism."³⁷ From an Orthodox point of view, one of the deficiencies of Augustine's theology is his doctrine of grace and free will, and this is because of his overstatement of divine grace and his understatement of human choice and ascetical labour. According to Augustine's doctrine, the appearance of divine

³² Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses* (see above, n. 30), p. 201.

³³ Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses* (see above, n. 30), p. 246.

³⁴ Serafim Sarovskii, *Beseda startsa Serafima s N.A. Motovilovym o tseli khristianskozhizni* (Moskva, 1991). See the English translation on the web-site: <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/wonderful.aspx>; last accessed on 6 February 2010.

³⁵ John Anthony McGuckin, 'Symeon the New Theologian *Hymns of Divine Eros*: A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition,' *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5:2 (2005), pp. 182–202, there 183.

³⁶ Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses* (see above, n. 30), p. 252.

³⁷ Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: St Symeon the New Theologian* (Crestwood, NY, 1986), p. 217.

uncreated light would not be possible as a result of ascetical practice.³⁸ Moreover, the doctrine of 'created' grace usually attributed to Augustine is also incompatible with Orthodox teachings about illumination by uncreated grace. Therefore, it would be difficult to establish a theology of the icon based on Augustine's teachings because his thought—as it is perceived in the Orthodox tradition—lacks the notion of synergy between God and human beings in their process of deification.

Colours

Future existence in the Kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of necessity but the highest confirmation of the freedom of rational beings, both angels and humans. Therefore, the iconographer depicts persons in a palette ranging from the darkest colours to the brightest in order to express symbolically their freedom to embrace the Kingdom of God. With every lighter tone laid over the first and darkest layer of colour, the iconographer expresses the theological concept of transition, the transition of creation from non-being to being, and from being to eternal being, and this through the artistic language of the movement from darkness to light, shapelessness to shape. In contrast to demons, saints are depicted in the brightest colours because they have freely attained the likeness of Christ who is the light. Bright tones are succeeded by yet brighter ones until the whole technical process is completed by laying in a gold leaf background or halos that surround the heads of the saints. Gold is not a colour of the natural spectrum; it is more a symbol of the saint's acquired likeness to Christ and it signifies that they are adopted by the Father.

Perspective

The persons and objects depicted in the icons are scaled according to the geometry of their value and position in the "eye" of God, as opposed to a mathematically inflected geometry.³⁹ The position and value of persons

³⁸ Archimandrite Chrysostomos, 'Review of *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, by Seraphim Rose,' *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28:4 (1983), pp. 382–384, there 382.

³⁹ Charles Lock, 'Iconic Space and the Materiality of Sign,' *Religion and Art* 1:4 (Winter 1997), pp. 6–22, there 8.

and objects depend on their relation to God and not on their location in time and space. Due to the fact that the Kingdom of God is designated not only for humans but also for the whole of created nature, icons are not anthropomonic, i.e., they do not represent human beings alone. Human beings, created as the crown of creation and as mediators between sensible nature and God, occupy the supreme place in sensible nature and, therefore, they always occupy the central place in icons. Perspective also helps the iconographer to transmit theological ideas about the reality of the Kingdom. The function of perspective, then, is not to establish a relationship between the spectator and the icon but to confirm a relationship between God and the spectator through the icon. In order to achieve this, the iconographer uses a so-called inverse perspective, which is a combination of several perspectives, such as inverse, central, and isometric, and these create a dynamic movement both away and towards the image.⁴⁰ Contrary to central or one-point perspective, which is characterized by lines that converge in some fictitious space behind the image, creating the impression of a third dimension, in inverse perspective, the lines pass through real space in front of the icon and converge on the spectator. By using inverse perspective, the iconographer succeeds in transmitting the reality of three-dimensional space without violating the plane of the panel by creating the optical illusion of depth.⁴¹

Moreover, in inverse perspective, a spectator becomes the object of perception. The gaze of the icon is the gaze of God, and through the icon the spectator is seen by God. The old practice of iconographers of painting first a great eye on the empty canvas and then writing underneath the word 'God', proves that icons are not seen just as windows towards eternity but also as heaven's own windows onto earth.⁴² By locating the vanishing point in which the lines converge not in some fictitious space outside the icon but in front of the panel, the iconographer expresses the theological belief that being present in front of an icon means being in the presence of God.

⁴⁰ Jean-Claude Larchet, *L'iconographe et l'artiste* (Paris, 2008), pp. 43–48. The author mainly relies on Erwin Panofsky, *Die Perspektive als "symbolische Form"* (Leipzig, 1927).

⁴¹ Léonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (New York, 1982), p. 41.

⁴² For more about the practice of depicting the "eye" of God, see Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (Lisse, 1976), p. 39.

The Depiction of Augustine in Orthodox Iconography

The saints are represented in their eschatological or eternal state by virtue of their links with Christ. This means that they are depicted with the elements of their historical life that bound them to Christ. The representation of the saints depends on the role they played while they were on earth. Thus, the Holy Hierarchs are depicted in liturgical vestments as signs of their office. The Holy Teachers are depicted with books or scrolls; the Holy Martyrs often wear red robes and carry a cross as signs of their martyrdom; the Holy Warriors appear in armour with spears or swords; the Holy Ascetics and Hermits bear signs of ascetical deeds on their bodies; and the Holy Physicians are accompanied by instruments for healing.⁴³ In the case of a saint who has had more than one identity, as with bishops who were also martyrs or teachers of the universal Church, the iconographer may combine several elements.

In both ancient and modern Orthodox iconography, Augustine is commonly represented with attributes from his historical life. The first and most obvious sign in every Orthodox icon of Augustine is a *pallium*; this symbolizes his ecclesial authority as a bishop. There is actually no firm evidence that Augustine wore a *pallium*, because in the early Christian West, only the pope had the right to wear a *pallium*. Nevertheless, Augustine's representation with a *pallium* in any case serves to emphasize his office of bishop.

The second and also very important element in the iconography of Augustine is the book. It signifies his role as a teacher and Doctor of the Church. It should be stated, however, that there are differences among the representations of teachers of the Church. Sometimes, they are depicted with a book and sometimes they simply hold a scroll. This has led some contemporary painters to depict Augustine with a scroll which, partially unrolled, reveals verses from his works, usually the opening sentence of his *Confessions* [fig. 3]. This practice of depicting the teachers of the Church with scrolls belongs to an ancient tradition of representing learned monks or ascetics; it never pertained to bishops. In almost all icons, from the fresco of Cefalù to contemporary Orthodox icons, Augustine is depicted holding a book. The book held by Augustine does not represent his works, for it is the book of the Gospels. It was ancient practice in the Church to consecrate bishops before a reading of the Gospels; priests were ordained

⁴³ For a full account of the classes of saints, see Henry Maguire, *The Icons and their Bodies* (New Jersey, 1996), pp. 48–87.

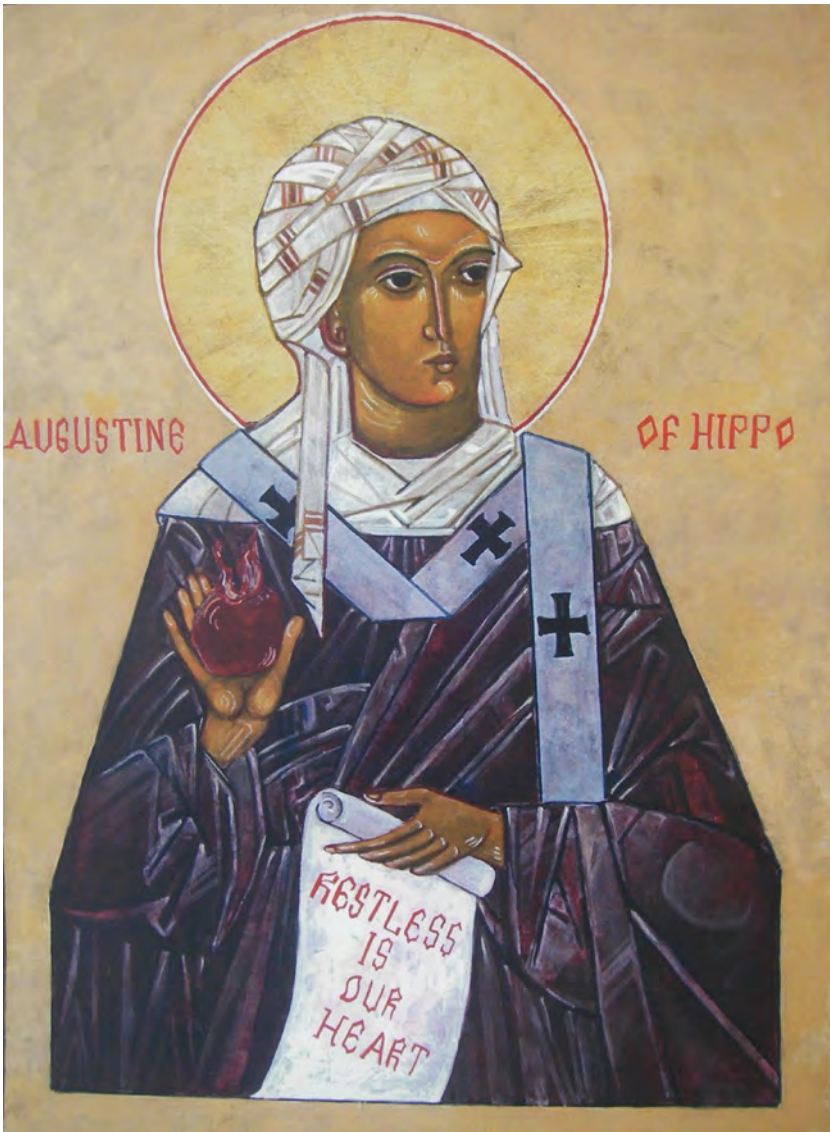


Figure 3. Richard G. Cannuli, OSA, St. Augustine of Hippo, Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood, 2007, Collection of the Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, Villanova, Penn., USA.

at the Great Entrance, and deacons still later in the course of the liturgy, at the end of the Eucharistic prayers. The place and time of the consecration symbolically signifies the ministry of each candidate: deacons help in administering Holy Communion, priests consecrate the Gifts together with the bishop, and bishops proclaim the Gospel by teaching and preaching it.⁴⁴ Augustine entered the eternal memory of God by exercising the ministry of the bishop and by preaching the Word to a particular Christian community. The book of the Gospels that he holds is confirmation of this truth.

Another element often seen in the Orthodox depiction of Augustine is his tonsure, also called the Roman tonsure. This is generally the symbol of the monastic vow or of clerical ordination. In the case of the Orthodox depiction of Augustine it refers, rather, to the fact that he comes from the Latin West where the practice of wearing the tonsure was widespread.

Two universal symbols of holiness are the halo surrounding the head of the saint and his name written within the composition. The halo around Augustine's head is a confirmation that he is received as a saint in the Heavenly Kingdom. The inscription, always in the form "Augustine of Hippo," signifies that he is preserved in the eternal memory of God and the Church, and under his Christian name as received at baptism and under the name of the city where he served a particular Christian community as bishop. The inscription has the purpose of expressing the archetype of Augustine.⁴⁵ The image of Augustine alone could not, therefore, serve as the icon of him because veneration should be equally given to both his image and his name.

Unfortunately there is no standard model for the depiction of Augustine's facial features. However, we might discern two models. One is probably established by the author of the mosaics in Cefalù Cathedral, in which Augustine is depicted in later life, with greyish hair, a beard slightly divided into two tufts, and wearing the tonsure. Numerous contemporary artists, both Orthodox and western, rely on this traditional model, especially in depicting Augustine's facial features. The second model, most known by Orthodox Christians today, is a work of the contemporary iconographer Christos Liondas [fig. 4]. Augustine is here represented in his early years, with curly brown hair, a curly beard with two tufts and also with the tonsure. Liondas belongs to the generation of contemporary Greek painters,

⁴⁴ Andrew Louth, "Biographical sketch," in *Abba: The Tradition of the Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos Ware*, ed. John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos (New York, 2003), pp. 13–28, there 26.

⁴⁵ Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (see above, n. 42), p. 11.

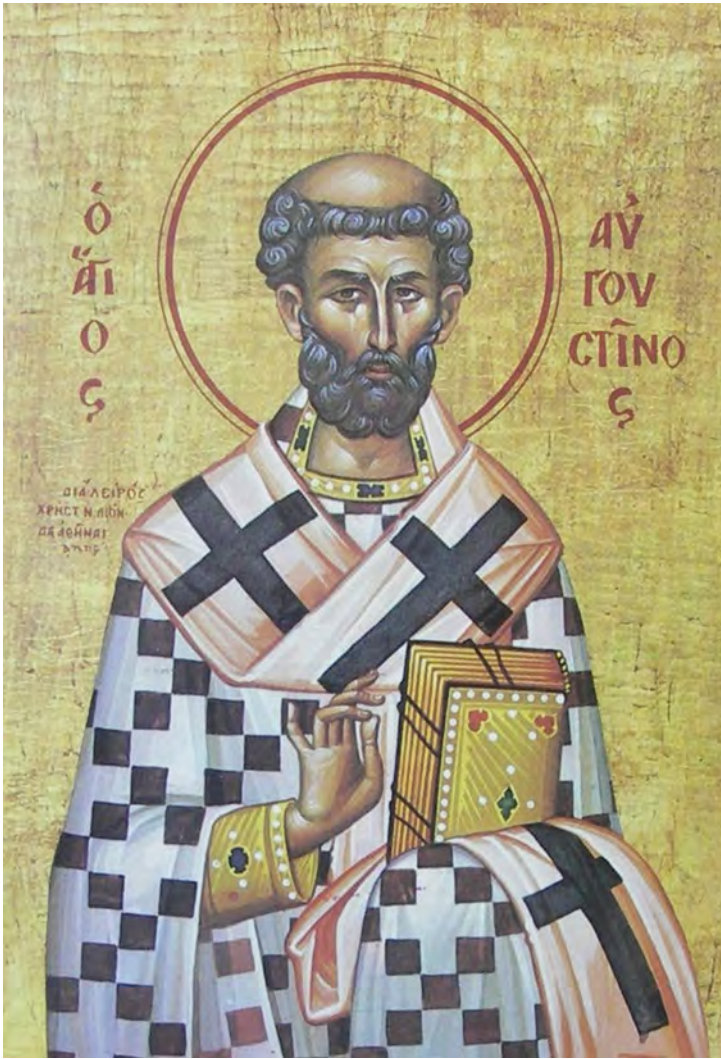


Figure 4. Christos N. Liondas, O Agios Augustinos, Acrylic and gold leaf on wood, 1987, Athens, Greece. [From the book Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, California, 1996), front cover].

including Ralles Kopsides, who due to the lack of traditional Byzantine patterns used artistic imagination to depict the image of Augustine.

It is a noticeable tendency among contemporary iconographers to combine the traditional iconographic canon with some motifs borrowed from Western, mainly Renaissance representations of Augustine. These include the motif of the “burning heart” [fig. 3]. This particular attribute does not

represent an essential element of Augustine's life in the Future Kingdom, for it is an artistic fiction, even if it refers to the state of eternal yearning for God (ἐπέκτασις in Greek). While it is a matter of common sense to presume that Augustine did not carry the burning heart around in his earthly life, one could ask how we are sure that this is not possible from the eschatological perspective. Orthodox iconographers are not inventors of future things, for they mostly rely on the testimonies of the Church Fathers. In our case it is helpful to refer to the words of Maximus the Confessor, who describes the reality of the transfigured bodies of the saints:

He [God] gives them life, not the life that comes from breathing air, nor that of veins coursing with blood, but the life that comes from being fully infused with the fullness of God.⁴⁶

The fullness of God, according to Symeon the New Theologian, will be complete infusion with the divine light. Even if the motif of the burning heart metaphorically refers to love of God, it is difficult to accept that bodily organs can find a place in the future Kingdom of God. It is, as a result, quite obvious that there is no room in Orthodox iconography for such exaggerated symbolism. Even if such iconography employs the language of symbolic representation, this language has to convey a theological message and it has to be canonically normative, not the expression of artistic invention.

Sometimes contemporary iconographers depict Augustine not with the signs of his ministerial office, such as the *pallium* and the Bible, but with scrolls on which verses from his *Confessions* can be read. There is no doubt that his scholarly work contributed to his status as a saint in the "eyes of God," but the real origin of his intellectual inspiration is not his genius but, rather, the grace of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Gospels signify the work of the Holy Spirit *par excellence* and the office of bishop is directly connected to the charisma of preaching the Good News.

Conclusion

The icon shows the transfigured world where the salvation of humankind has taken place. The icon does not, then, represent every man and woman

⁴⁶ Maximus Confessoris, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 7, PG 91:1088c. The English translation is in Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, trans., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (New York, 2003), p. 63.

but, rather, “the saints as God’s chosen friends who have the right to appear before Him.”⁴⁷ Icons are not, however, the only medium that transmits a message of the sanctification and deification of human beings, for they comprise only one of the interconnected media by which the space of a church building communicates with the believers. Everything in the church, from architecture and inscriptions, liturgical prayers, hymns, and censuring, to the act of receiving communion, symbolically expresses the reality of the future Kingdom of God. As diverse means of expression relative to the Good News, all these media depend on and refer to each other. It would be deceitful, therefore, to think of these media in terms of simple transfer, as is usually thought about icons; that is, as simple transformations of text into image. The written sources, such as biblical accounts and other kinds of textual description (ἔκφρασις) undoubtedly serve as sources of inspiration to iconographers. However, the iconographers often go a step further in their depiction of scenes and objects in order to emphasize not an historical, but an eschatological reality. Then in return the faithful perceive the content of readings or hymns in an eschatological perspective too. The most important contribution of the Orthodox iconography of Augustine is its confirmation of his heavenly status and likeness to God. By specific artistic techniques and elements, the iconographer establishes a relationship between the viewer and the saint, and, through the saint, between the viewer or devotee and God. The inverse perspective of the icon clearly suggests that the person looking at the icon is placed within the space that the icon represents. It rests with each person, however, to choose his or her own way of special participation with the icon. By choosing the means of participation, one can treat the icon either as an artistic object or as a sacrament. To express this in more modern terms, the viewer chooses to engage either a window-image or a mirror-image.⁴⁸ When the icon acts simply as a window image, then the viewer does not respond to the gaze of the saint in the icon and consequently to its divine energies; the icon ceases to be a sacrament. If the viewer acts as a devotee, he or she responds to both the gaze of the saint and the divine energies, and these constitute him or her by way of the image. Thus, the icon acts as a mirror-image and includes the viewer within the space that it represents, the Kingdom of God.

⁴⁷ St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* (New York, 2003), p. 111.

⁴⁸ Lock, ‘Iconic Space and the Materiality of Sign’ (see above, n. 39), pp. 8–9

With the icon of Augustine, the devotee not only establishes a relationship with the true identity of the saint as he is perceived by God, for the devotee also encounters Augustine as a mediator on his behalf before God. Through prayers to Augustine in front of his icon, the faithful viewer offers veneration and honour to him as a benefactor. The honour and veneration thus offered to the saints is transmitted to God because the saints are not benefactors by their own nature; they are ministers of God. Each prayer recited in front of the icon of Augustine is one step further toward the future Kingdom; this is because Augustine intercedes before God on behalf of the faithful.