

Christian Humility and Democratic Citizenry: St. Augustine and Jacques Maritain

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Introduction

Jacques Maritain believed that a solid and secure democracy would be animated by Gospel values. In *Man and the State* he describes this belief in the mutually reinforcing relationship between Christianity and democracy:

The more the body politic were imbued with Christian convictions and aware of the religious faith which inspires it, the more deeply it would adhere to the secular faith in the democratic character; for as a matter of fact, the latter has taken shape in human history as a result of the Gospel inspiration awakening the “naturally Christian” potentialities of common secular consciousness, even among the diversity of spiritual lineages and schools of thought opposed to each other, and sometimes warped by a vitiated ideology.¹

Unfortunately, those today who join Maritain in claiming that Christian convictions strengthen democratic values rarely consider the prominent role of humility in the Christian tradition. Throughout the history of Christianity, humility has been central to the understanding of Christian discipleship. However, in an age psychologically attuned to the problem of low self-esteem and in a culture fixated on self-promotion, humility has become an unpopular, if not forgotten, virtue. Once regarded as *the* Christian attribute, found in an authentic sense of creaturehood, an acknowledgment of one’s need for God, and a total abandonment to the will of God, humility is now looked upon by many as a weakness or character flaw.² Humility goes against a deeply imbedded impulse in our culture to overcome

¹ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 113.

² The following is a sampling of authors who discuss the marginal condition of humility in modern society, in today’s Christian community, and in contemporary scholarship in religious ethics: Matthew Baasten, “Humility and Modern Ethics” *Reformed Review* Spring 38 (1985), p. 3; Roberta C. Bondi, “Humility: A Meditation on An Ancient Virtue For Modern Christians,” *Quarterly Review* (1983); John Casey, *Pagan Virtue: An Essay in Ethics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 199-200, 211; Brian E. Daley, S.J., “To Be More Like Christ: The Background and Implications of “Three Kinds of Humility,”” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 27 (1995); James F. Keenan,

or simply deny the frailty, imperfection, and incompleteness of our lives. Moreover, in our image-conscious, control-oriented world, it is often associated with passivity and a fawning deference to those in power.

Even within Christianity, concerns about humility have been raised in the latter half of this century. For example, in the Roman Catholic church, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the world-affirming and liberating dimensions of Christian spirituality have been emphasized more than the earlier other-worldly and ascetical elements.³ Attention is given to the power of our human capacities and each person's responsibility for shaping his or her identity and social context. Those on the margins of society and of the church are encouraged to stand up and be counted while those in subservient positions are urged to confront the structures of domination. However, these essential Christian values tend to be placed in opposition to humility, which is regarded, at best, as a private, ascetical disposition and, at worst, as an attitude of weak passivity. Amidst contemporary efforts to identify and cultivate the apostolic and empowering aspects of discipleship, humility has been relegated to the periphery of Christian life and is often seen as a hindrance to social justice.

My aim in this paper is to draw upon St. Augustine's theology in order to retrieve the distinctively Christian roots and social applications of humility. Augustine is exceptional among the Christian Fathers of both East and West in highlighting Christ's humility as the hallmark of Christianity, utterly different from the moral values of antiquity.⁴ Through the teachings of Augustine, I will examine how this frequently dismissed virtue can be reappropriated in contemporary Christian life, even Christian political life. First I will briefly consider some contemporary concerns and criticisms of humility. Next, I will outline the Christological basis for Augustine's understanding of this Christian disposition. Then, based on this theological understanding of humility, I will show some of the political and social implications of Augustinian humility. Finally, I will consider how a true embodiment of humility among Christian citizens today could help advance Maritain's vision of a "personalist" democracy that fosters the "spirit of the Gospel."⁵ This will bring into focus how Christian humility can be constructive for the task of education within a democracy, particularly a democracy in a pluralistic

Virtues for Ordinary Christians (Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed and Ward, 1996), pp. 70-71; Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 18-21; Nancy Snow, "Humility," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 29 (1995), pp. 203-16; John M. Templeton, *The Humble Approach: Scientists Discover God* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981).

³ See *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1965), in eds. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 191-195; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1984).

⁴ D. J. MacQueen, "Contemptus Dei: St. Augustine on the Disorder of Pride in Society, and Its Remedies," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 9 (1973), pp. 237-59, 280.

⁵ Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 179.

society. The link between Christian humility and democratic citizenry, then, is found specifically in Maritain's insistence that education, both in academia and more broadly within public discourse, is crucial to a more Christian culture and civilization. For Maritain, the political task is essentially "a task of civilization and culture."⁶

Contemporary Views of Humility

In a society increasingly shaped by "the triumph of the therapeutic,"⁷ humility evokes images of a self-deprecating person with little sense of his or her own self-worth. Thus, the modern person links humility with a polite modesty, or, more negatively, with cowardice. At the social level, humility is associated with a world-renouncing mentality that produces inaction and a retreat from serious engagement in the struggle, so essential to democracy, for justice and the common good.

One source of this challenge to humility comes from many contemporary feminists who voice concern that traditional Christian virtues, such as humility, can impede women's struggle for self-realization, and discourage a healthy egoism.⁸ Many Christian feminists associate humility with submission to a male-dominated culture and church, which expect women to give of themselves in ways that compromise their own integrity.⁹ In her now classic article, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View,"¹⁰ Valerie Saiving Goldstein argues that traditional Christian exhortations to self-sacrifice serve to correct the *male* temptation to pride but are less applicable to the moral problems that most women face. For women, Goldstein argues, the primary temptation is failing to develop a centered self.¹¹ This discussion has led feminists to ask whether upholding humility as a central virtue favors a male-oriented approach to virtue and perpetuates a patriarchal framework for ethics.¹²

Offering a perspective somewhat unique in relation to many feminist scholars, Roberta Bondi takes up the task of seeking to recover humility from its long-standing misapplications, particularly in reference to women. For Bondi, the true humility found in the life and work of the early monastics inspires a reconsideration of this ancient virtue for modern times. Similar to the aims of this paper, Bondi seeks to re-present Christian humility and reclaim it for men and women in the modern context. She acknowledges the challenge of recovering this humility and

⁶ Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Gordian Press, 1971), p. 44.

⁷ Phillip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

⁸ Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40 (1960), pp. 100-12; Anne E. Patrick, *Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1996); Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1980).

⁹ Roberta Bondi, *To Love As God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 46-56; Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

¹⁰ Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion*, 40 (1960), pp. 100-12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹² Anne Patrick, "Narrative and The Social Dynamics of Virtue," in *Changing Values and Virtues*, eds. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 77-78.

seeks to understand the negative associations it has acquired. Noting how humility has often been misapplied, she writes:

Across the many centuries of the Christian era up to the modern world when women have been exhorted to be humble, humility included as one of its components being obedient to their husbands, fathers, brothers, and/or priests. Humility has been a shorthand word for recognizing and accepting an inferior position in the world. Sometimes it has included accepting that other people had a right to buy or sell them ... The real difficulty is not so much that women have been taught to serve but that service seems to demand loss of self. The very phrase, "selfless love" raises the specter of a woman without any needs, desires, or even personality of her own.¹³

Women, as we have seen, have been encouraged to adopt a type of false humility whereby they serve others at the expense of their true selves. They often compromise their own talents and freedom in submitting to others. Bondi points to the manipulative uses of humility which amount to a false humility. For example, self-sacrifice can be a ploy to induce guilt and put another person in one's debt. She writes:

Unfortunately, so many of us have been so victimized by this pattern of relating to people at home, in church, and at work that both the words "self-sacrifice" and "humility" fill us with horror. One result is that to talk with any meaning of the humility or self-sacrifice of Christ has become nearly impossible to a good many people. But the "you take the only good chair" way of dealing with others is manipulation, not humility. It is a gross perversion of Christianity, and it needs to be recognized for what it is. Real humility brings freedom and love to its recipients, not guilt and resentment.¹⁴

Christian humility, Bondi argues, has nothing to do with such low self-esteem and somber self-accusation. The early monastics, for example, found in humility the grounds for building relationships free from the demands of image-making as well as the cultural norms of dominance and subservience. Humility does not suggest that a woman sacrifice the core of who she is to be wholly committed to others. "Being a doormat," Bondi argues, "is not being humble, nor is giving up the self in order to serve the needs, desires, and whims of another person who is not God."¹⁵ Rather, a woman's devotion to others must flow out of her core identity which is found in her relationship to God—a relationship that makes possible a love that is fundamentally joyful, relational, and life-giving.

One of Augustine's great insights, beautifully illustrated in the *Confessions*, is that knowledge of self is inextricably linked to knowledge of God. True self-knowledge is found only in relationship to the divine. Augustine writes: "For what

¹³ Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

I know of myself I know because you grant me light, and what I do not know of myself, I do not know until such time as my darkness becomes 'like noonday' before your face (Isa. 58:10)."¹⁶ Paradoxically, leaving behind the illusory self, that is, the self that functions as its own *principium*, leads to the discovery of one's true identity in God. Before God, the true self, which readily gives of self to others, come to the surface.

Insofar as a person withholds his or her talents and human capabilities from others, false humility (a manifestation of pride) is at work. Exaggerated self-disparagement and a cowering detachment from others are distortions of Christian humility, even if they are all too frequently adopted in Christian attempts to live humbly. However, Christian humility, at its uncommon best, emerges from the free decision to give of oneself to God and others. In other words, humility has an expansive and liberating quality that frees a person from the fears of the ego and awakens a person to the fullest expression of human dignity.

And so, as we consider humility today it is important to distinguish Christian humility from false humility: to discern the difference between manipulative self-abnegation or coerced self-sacrifice, on the one hand, and a true giving of self to others modeled on the *kenosis* or outpouring of Christ's love, on the other.

Augustine's Understanding of Humility

Writing in Latin-speaking North Africa at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, Augustine consistently presents humility as a central notion for understanding Christ and the Christian way of life. Among the Church Fathers, Augustine is noted for insisting most strongly upon humility's centrality for Christian discipleship.¹⁷ The theological basis for Augustine's doctrine of humility is in his Christology for he derives his understanding of humility from the Gospel narratives of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Augustine upholds Christ as the archetype of Christian humility so that a truly compelling, transforming, and comprehensive account of this virtue must derive from an understanding of Christ who grounds and animates true humility. Augustine's wonder at the "humble God" (*humilis deus*)¹⁹ of Jesus Christ reverberates throughout his works. In Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, divine love is revealed "in the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). The self-emptying (*kenosis*) of the Word—the divine descent into human history—is the paradigmatic form and source of humility in Christian

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.5.7, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 182-83.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, John Chrysostom all upheld Christ as the model of humility. But P. Adnès observes that Augustine is most insistent about this theme: "Mais c'est peut-être chez Augustin que le thème prend le plus de relief. Docteur et maître de l'humilité, le Christ l'est non seulement par ses paroles et sa doctrine, mais par ses actes et son exemple: 'Magister humilitatis verbo et exemplo.'" "Humilité," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 7 (1969), pp. 1153-54.

¹⁸ *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 31.2.18: "Via humilitatis huius aliunde manat; a Christo venit. Haec via ab illo est, qui cum esset altus, humilis venit." *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), vol. 38, p. 239.

¹⁹ *De catechizandis rudibus*, 4.8.

discipleship.²⁰ Christian humility is thus more than a virtue that God urges upon us. It is the very way God's Word comes to us and invites us to pattern our lives.²¹ The way of humility, then, is primarily God's way. Only by extension is it our way, insofar as we imitate the divine through Christian discipleship.

According to Augustine, one way to understand Christ's humility, is to see it in opposition to pride, the root of human sin expressed in the desire to substitute the self for God and dominate over others.²² Augustine's use of the word *superbia*, often translated as "pride," means something more serious than what is generally conveyed by "pride" in the modern context where pride is regarded as boastfulness or at best, self-assuredness and confidence. Deriving his understanding of pride principally from the biblical doctrine of creation, and deeply influenced by the text of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach 10:13), Augustine writes: "The beginning of all sin is pride; and 'The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God.'²³ It has been written, it is sure, it is true."²⁴ For Augustine, the vice of pride always entails, at its root, an offense or revolt against God. It does not have a strictly anthropocentric sphere of reference as it tends to in contemporary parlance.

In the *City of God*, Augustine discusses this fall of the human race as originating inwardly in the pride of the corrupted will:

It was in secret that the first human beings began to be evil; and the result was that they slipped into open disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act if an evil will had not preceded it. Now could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will? For 'pride is the start of every kind of sin' (Eccles. 10:13). And what is pride except a longing for a perverse kind of exaltation?²⁵

Pride is the original sin: it was through pride that the first human parents fell from harmony with God and passed on to their descendants a need for the restoration of friendship with God. In the passage above, Augustine claims that this first sin originates not principally from the body but from the will. It begins in a failure to accept creatureliness. Instead of seeking to be like God according to God's will, the proud person wills to achieve God-like status on his or her own terms.²⁶

Augustine views the dichotomy between pride and humility not principally in ethical terms but in ontological ones because pride offends the very structure of reality and humility abides by it. Pride and humility represent two fundamentally different responses to the givenness of created reality. Augustine believes that there

²⁰ *Serm.* 92.2; *Serm.* 68.

²¹ Augustine often discusses humility in connection with the exhortation of Matthew's Gospel: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart." (11:29); see *Confessions* 7.9.14; *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John* 25.18; *City of God* 14:13.

²² Augustine and other Fathers (Basil, John Chrysostom, Dorotheus of Gaza) considered pride as the central vice.

²³ *Ecclesiasticus* 10:13 is first quoted in *De musica* 6.13.40.

²⁴ *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 25.15 trans. J.W. Rettig, p. 253.

²⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.13, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Classics, 1984), p. 571.

²⁶ Marthinus Versfeld, "The notions of pride and imitation in St. Augustine," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 2.4 (1983), p. 180.

is truth and purpose in created reality, but it is not a purpose that *we* create. God alone gives purpose, meaning, and direction to the world. Humility, then, involves a submission: neither a submission to something of one's own creation, nor to an arbitrary set of rules, but, a submission to reality. This reality is designed with a definite orientation to goodness, a goodness modeled upon the goodness of God the Creator. Augustine teaches that ordered love (*ordo amoris*)²⁷ reflects the ordering of creation by the Creator. God is loved first above all other beings and in this love of God flows a proper love of self, neighbor, and lesser things, in that order.²⁸

Augustine sees pride as the most nefarious of the vices because it can be present even when one appears to be doing good. Long before Nietzsche set out to reveal the pride hidden under the cloak of humility, Augustine warned his fellow African Christians about false humility for actions that seem humble often can be the most deeply arrogant. Knowing that when a person doing good begins to crave praise and honor, appearances can become more valued than the good deed, he warns: "We must be fearful of all the other vices in sin, but pride we have to fear even when we do right. We mustn't let our desire for praise cost us the things we do that are worthy of praise."²⁹

Robert Markus points out that another feature of Augustine's notion of pride involves a retreat into privacy, at the expense of giving oneself to others and ultimately to God.³⁰ Pride can move from more overt expressions of dominance to a more concealed closing of the heart. Pursuing individual interest before the good of others turns the self in upon itself. Pride, then, has a depersonalizing and isolating effect in that one loves others not for what they are but for how they meet one's desires. In this underappreciated dimension of pride there is a movement of separation successively from God, oneself, and others. Markus explains:

At first [pride] is identified with taking pleasure in the wrong things, pleasing oneself rather than God; in the second stage, this is refined: pride is here seen in taking pleasure in God's good things, but as if one had proprietary rights to them; finally, whittling it down to its most insidious form, he will present pride as the desire for privacy at the expense of sharing. Here is the opposition we found in the *De Genesi ad litteram* between the shared, the social, and the private, the last and most hidden refuge of pride. The subtlest temptation is that of the retreat into self, the fear "of belonging to another, or to others, or to God."³¹

The depersonalizing effect of pride is demonstrated in the first four books of the *Confessions* where Augustine, while being very sociable, does not mention any friends

²⁷ *City of God*, 15.22, p. 636.

²⁸ *Sermon 336.2* in Augustine, *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1990), part 3, vol. 9, p. 267. All other references to the sermons are from this edition.

²⁹ *Letters of Saint Augustine*, trans. John Leinenweber (Tarrytown, New York: Triumph Books, 1992), p. 101.

³⁰ R. A. Markus, "De civitate dei: Pride and the Common Good," *Augustine "Second Founder of the Faith"* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 245-59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

by name, let alone the name of his mistress of fourteen years! Augustine even finds that he is a “stranger” to himself insofar as he is estranged from God.³²

Relying on their own audacious drive for self-sufficiency, the proud stand alone and become their own *principium*. The Stoics, for example, ascribed virtue to themselves rather than acknowledging God as the source of all virtue and goodness.³³ Scorning the pride of the Manichaeans, Augustine remarks, “The trouble is that they want to be light not in the Lord but in themselves.”³⁴ In the *City of God*, Augustine explains how pride can advance from a rejection of creatureliness to a lust for power and domination over others: “[P]ride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a fellowship of equality under God, and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in place of God’s rule.”³⁵ The isolation and distortion of pride objectifies others who become the victims of a self-inflated ego. Here Augustine shows the interdependence of love of God and the love of neighbor for the rejection of one automatically entails a rejection of the other.

Having emphasized the fall from God through pride, Augustine turns to the remedy of Christ, “the humble God.”³⁶ In an act of humility, Christ “came down” to us. Out of love, he shares in our creatureliness and reverses our rejection of creatureliness. He shows the scandal of our own pride and makes possible our restoration.³⁷ In *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, Augustine marvels at Christ’s humility as the “counteracting remedy” to our pride:

[T]he same Lord Jesus Christ, God-man, is both a manifestation of divine love towards us, and an example of human humility with us, to the end that our great swelling might be cured by a greater counteracting remedy. For here is a great misery, proud man! But there is greater mercy, a humble God!³⁸

Here Augustine points to the antitheses between pride/humility and illness/cure, as well as an antithesis of movement. The movement of the Incarnation “towards us” from superiority to inferiority is the reverse of the movement of human pride “away from God” from inferiority to superiority.

At a crucial moment in the *Confessions* Augustine sees the egoism of the Neoplatonists as *the reason* for their disdain toward the Incarnation. Stressing the contrast between Christ’s *humilitas* and the Platonists’ *superbia*, he asks: “Where was the charity which builds on the foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus?”

³² Perhaps one contemporary manifestation of this prideful depersonalization and withdrawal from others is the pervasive social and political apathy. In the United States, this is evidenced in the disheartening turnouts at the polls, the membership decline in voluntary associations, the growing mistrust of politicians, and the overall cynicism toward social and political engagement.

³³ *Letter* 155.2;4;6.

³⁴ *Confessions*, 8.10.22, Chadwick, p. 148.

³⁵ *City of God*, 19.12, Bettenson, pp. 868-69.

³⁶ Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 4.8, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, p. 287.

³⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 50.8, vol. 2.

³⁸ Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 4.8.

When would the Platonist books teach me that?"³⁹ Here, Christ's humility is placed at the forefront of this tension between Greek philosophy and Christianity.

In Augustine's own conversion, Christ's humility plays a pivotal role in overcoming his pride for in contemplating "the humble God" he finds his love radically reoriented. In the final stages of his conversion, Augustine does not come to God by way of an intellectual insight or a moral breakthrough. Rather, the drama of divine lowliness evokes Augustine's surrender in faith. With awe he writes about the transforming power of humility made manifest in the Incarnation: "They [i.e., humble Christians] see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our 'coat of skin' (Gen. 3:21). In their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which raises and lifts them up."⁴⁰

As he reflects upon the mystery of the Incarnation and the Cross, Augustine insists that humility stands as the most fundamental disposition necessary for all who seek to follow in Christ's footsteps. In a famous letter to Dioscorus, a young Greek scholar, Augustine upholds humility as the condition and foundation for Christian living:

To [Christ] ... I wish you to submit with complete devotion, and to construct no other way for yourself of grasping and holding the truth than the way constructed by Him who, as God, saw how faltering were our steps. This way is first humility, second humility, third humility, and however often you should ask me I would say the same, not because there are no other precepts to be explained, but if humility does not precede and accompany and follow every good work we do, and if it is not set before us to look upon, and beside us to lean upon, and behind us to fence us in, pride will wrest from our hand any good deed we do while we are in the very act of taking pleasure in it.⁴¹

Here Augustine applies his rhetorical skill to uphold humility as the beginning, middle, and end of Christian discipleship. He insists that humility is more than a virtue or an antidote to pride. It is the fundamental Christian orientation which prepares the way for all other Christian virtues.

At its most basic level, humility requires an honesty about our proper place in the divine ordering of creation. It does not insist upon self-degradation but true self-knowledge. Rather than being a mask for pride, true humility guards against pride and its many forms of self-aggrandizement. Humility holds in check the perverse human tendency to "play God."⁴² It begins with a surrender to God's primacy and an acceptance of our creaturely dependence on God's grace. As humility deepens it entails a confession of sin (disordered love) which violates the created order, and reveals our need for God's grace. Finally, in freeing us from egocentricity, humility brings joy in the discovery of the true value of ourselves and others in God.

³⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.20.26, Chadwick, p. 130.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.18.24, Chadwick, p. 128.

⁴¹ Augustine, "Letter 118," trans. Wilfrid Parsons, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 18 (New York: The Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), p. 282.

⁴² Augustine, *Sermon 137.4*, vol. 4, p. 374.

From this stance of truthfulness we can grow in a readiness to love as God loves: to give wholly of ourselves in love to others. Augustine's vision of Christ's humility as the distinctive mode and character of Christian loving highlights how such love has a sacrificial character requiring a free giving of self without the expectation of something in return. Integral to humility is the transformation of egocentric love into theocentric love which turns grasping, exploitative, and possessive impulses into an authentic love of self and a true solidarity with others for the sake of God.⁴³ This teaching on humility comes from one of Augustine's favorite passage from St. Paul: "... though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6-7).⁴⁴ Consequently, humility has a radically social dimension whereby it finds expression in service to others and in radical self-giving modeled on the *kenosis* or outpouring of the divine Word.

Augustine regularly links together humility and Christian love (*caritas*). Preaching in 413, he explains to his congregation that Christ's humility is the essential source and foundation of the Christian's own self-giving:

Learn from him [Christ], because he is meek and humble of heart. Dig in yourself this foundation of humility, and you will eventually reach the pinnacle of charity.⁴⁵

For Augustine, humility makes true Christian love possible for it is the soil out of which charity grows.⁴⁶

Moreover, Christ is the standard by which we distinguish true humility from false humility. Preaching on Matthew 11:25-27 near the end of his life, Augustine says:

You won't become humble unless you look at the one who became humble for your sake. Learn from Christ what you won't learn from man; in him is to be found the standard of humility (*norma humilitatis*). Those who measure up to him are first formed in humility, in order to be eventually honored with high nobility.⁴⁷

Humble self-giving modeled on the humble Christ requires physical and active love of others. Humility calls for a readiness to place oneself wholly at the service of others, as Christ demonstrates in the washing of his disciples' feet. Humbling himself before them, Christ demonstrates that his love is concrete, tangible, and unafraid to touch the unwashed parts of humanity, literally and figuratively:

We have learned, brothers, humbleness from an Exalted One; let us, humble in our turn, do what the Exalted One did humbly. Great is this commendation of humility! And the brothers do this to one another, and indeed by very visible activity, when

⁴³ Augustine, *Sermon* 250.5, vol. 7, p. 181.

⁴⁴ NRSV.

⁴⁵ *Sermon* 69.4, vol. 3, p. 237.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.2, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1990) part 1, vol. 5, p. 153.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 126.11: "*Disce a Christo, quod non discis ab homine: in illo est norma humilitatis; ad hunc qui accedit, prius in ipsa humilitate formatur, ut in exaltatione decoretur*"; see *Sermon* 68.11, vol. 3, p. 230.

they receive one another in hospitality. For among very many there is the habitual practice of this humility, even as regards the act by which it is exhibited and seen ... it is much better and indisputably truer that it should also be done by the hands; and let the Christian not disdain to do what Christ did. For when the body is bent to the brother's feet, the affection of humility itself either is stirred in the very heart or if it was already there, is strengthened ... by washing the feet of his already washed and cleansed disciples, the Lord signified, on account of the human affections in which we are involved on earth, that, however much progress we have made in the attainment of justice, we may know that we are not without sin; and he now and again washes by interceding for us when we pray that the Father who is in heaven forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.⁴⁸

In this act of foot washing, Christ reveals our ongoing need for the cleansing forgiveness that his hands perpetually extend to each one of us. By his own actions, he sets a high standard for the *practice* of humility. Reflecting upon this scene in John's Gospel, Augustine does not limit the meaning of this action to a spiritual attitude of humility but describes the healing touch of humility that is shown with the hands.

In our own concrete self-offering to one another, we become Christ's presence in the world. The humility of Christ is repeated time and again in the flesh through such active self-giving. Humility, in this context, is not simply a pure unmerited gift, but a gift that, paradoxically, needs to be cultivated. In humble service, in literally kneeling before the feet of our brothers and sisters, the self is not destroyed in servile abasement but reconstituted and perfected through a participation in the divine pattern of loving.

In sum, Augustinian love shaped by humility begins with an awareness of creatureliness and a trusting reliance upon God's grace. This orients a person outward toward others in love and service. Pride, in contrast, begins with a rejection of creatureliness and the attempt to be self-sufficient. This orients a person inward, away from God and neighbor.

Humility in Augustine's Political Thought

Augustine's belief that Christ is the foundation of humility has practical consequences and directly affects his ideas about the Christian disciple's relationship to the world. Augustine believed that the Christian is never fully a citizen of this world but is rather a "pilgrim" detached from those temporal concerns which prioritize the enjoyment of life, material possessions, and status. In the *City of God*, for instance, Augustine writes: "[H]umility is ... especially enjoined on the City of God during the time of its pilgrimage in this world."⁴⁹ The basic orientation of a Christian is to long for the true homeland that is the City of God. This "pilgrim" consciousness could curb some of the self-idolatry and materialism that can be so enervating in political life today. But is the "heavenly longing" so integral

⁴⁸ *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 58.4.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, 14:13, trans. Henry Bettenson, p. 573.

to Augustine's understanding of humility the type of longing that implies a contempt of the world and an isolation from social injustice? Does Augustine's promotion of humility among Christian citizens ultimately mean that Christians should be decent citizens, and just accept society as it is?⁵⁰

In his own time, Augustine recognized social inequalities as wrong, but the sheer weight of classical culture and politics and the endless cycle of human sinfulness seemed so increasingly intractable that he did not imagine that significant transformation in the temporal sphere was possible. Furthermore, Augustine gave priority to interior disposition over the more "external" roles played in society. These factors led him to deem it better to be the slave of a human master than the slave to lust for domination.⁵¹ In the *City of God*, he writes: "As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days' course, what does it matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?"⁵² Thus while acknowledging social injustices, Augustine did not expect a radical reformation of these structures of domination. Today after certain forms of slavery and oppression, though certainly not all, have been overcome, we are inevitably led to question Augustine's skepticism about social change.⁵³

Despite Augustine's increasingly low expectations for lasting transformation in this world, his teaching on the actual practice of humility offers a helpful counterweight to those who would absent themselves from concrete engagement with the world. In his sermons and in the *City of God*, however, Augustine also stresses the active and communal dimension of humility which offsets this skepticism and resignation about social change. The sermons, in particular, as we will see, appeal to Christ's deeds and inner attitude to develop the Christian way of life. Augustine points out that a humble attitude liberates us from despairing when our ideals are not fully realized, for humility fosters a willingness to face up to the needs of our human situation and our radical dependence on God. Christ's humility points toward realism and away from an idealism that so easily collapses into despair and defeatism. With an honest awareness of the sinful human condition and a ready trust in God's mercy, humble self-knowledge paves the way for more sustained work in the world. True self-knowledge, which is a basic form of humility, ushers in the more active and mature dimension of humility that calls for a total giving of oneself in love of neighbor.

⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Many scholars, Hannah Arendt most notably, have held that Augustine's political thought implies that Christians ought to remove themselves from the messiness of the world's political complexities.

⁵¹ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.15: "And obviously it is a happier lot to be slave to a human being than to a lust; and, in fact, the most pitiless domination that devastates the hearts of men, is that exercised by this very lust for domination, to mention no others. However, in that order of peace in which men are subordinate to other men, humility is as salutary for the servants as pride is harmful to the masters. And yet by nature, in the condition in which God created man, no man is the slave either of man or of sin," Bettenson, p. 875.

⁵² Augustine, *City of God*, 5.17, Bettenson, p. 205.

⁵³ Eugene TeSelle, "Towards an Augustinian Politics," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, p. 93.

In a homily on the works of mercy, Augustine refers to this *practice* of humility as “the humility of lending a helping hand.”⁵⁴ He challenges the wealthy of his day to consider how humility requires more than giving from a distance to assist the material needs of the poor. One must give personally with one’s own hands:⁵⁵

What’s called for, you see, is not only the kindness of lavishing assistance, but also the humility of lending a helping hand. I don’t know how it is, my brothers and sisters, but the spirit of the person who actually hands something to a poor man experiences a kind of sympathy with common humanity and infirmity, when the hand of the one who has is actually placed in the hand of the one who is in need. Although the one is giving, the other receiving, the one being attended to and the one attending are being joined in a real relationship. You see, it isn’t calamity that really unites us but humanity.⁵⁶

Here humility revealed by the Incarnate God calls for direct service and relationship with those in need. Humility is not the friendly condescension of the wealthy allaying their consciences. Rather, humility cuts through class differences by joining people in their common humanity, overturning the conventional patterns of human relating both in Augustine’s time and our own. As Christ becomes a neighbor to us in humility, we become neighbors to one another. Humility teaches that we are in solidarity with one another as members of his one Body. From the outside, a rich person bending down to help someone who is poor can suggest a disparity in worth or dignity, but humility frees a person to see through such distortions; both are indebted to God who gives salvation out of love not merit.

Moreover, Augustine points out that a humble attitude liberates us from despairing when our ideals are not fully realized, for there is a willingness to face up to the needs of our human situation and our radical dependence on God. In a homily on the Gospel of John 14:16 (“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”), Augustine explains:

To keep, however, to the middle way, the true, straight road, threading its way, as it were, between the left hand of despair and the right hand of presumption, would be extremely difficult for us, unless Christ had said I am the way ... Christ the way is the humble Christ; Christ the truth and the life is Christ exalted and God. If you walk along the humble Christ, you will arrive at the exalted Christ; if in your sickly health and debility you do not spurn the humble one, you will abide in perfect health and strength with the exalted one. What else, after all, was the reason for Christ’s humility, but your debility?⁵⁷

Christ’s humility, then, is the way out of despair and defeatism. With an honest acceptance of the human condition and a ready trust in God’s mercy, humility paves the way for a moral and spiritual regeneration.

⁵⁴ *Sermon* 250.5, vol. 7, p. 182.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, note 23, p. 184.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁷ *Sermon* 142.1, vol. 4, p. 413.

In the *City of God*, Augustine makes the point that the humble do not presume to know who is in the City of God. Those we consider our most reprehensible enemies may be future citizens of the City of God, for the two cities, of God and of man, are interwoven and intermixed until the separation at the last judgment. Thus, the logic of the two cities necessitates a refusal to pre-empt God's judgment. It calls for an openness to others, a Christian universality and egalitarianism which come from a concern for the destiny of every person, even those who seem unlikely citizens of the City of God. This eschatological outlook leads Augustine to point out that the church must bear in mind that among its pagan accusers "are hidden her future citizens; and when confronted with them she must not think it a fruitless task to *bear with their hostility* until she finds them confessing the faith."⁵⁸ Christians, then, ought not to dismiss their accusers but to persist with engagement and be alert to truth when it appears where it is least expected.⁵⁹ After all, according to Augustine's theological anthropology, no sinner is ever wholly cut off from the truth; no misconceptions or immorality are ever wasted. God uses our wanderings, even our sin, to further our conversion.⁶⁰ Furthermore, dialogue with those who do not share our convictions can be enriching and strengthening to our own grasp of the Christian tradition which is always incomplete. In the *City of God*, Augustine explains:

For we can see that many matters of importance to the Catholic faith are canvassed by the feverish restlessness of heretics, and the result is that they are more carefully examined, more clearly understood, and more earnestly propounded, with a view to defending them against heretical attack, and thus an argument aroused by an adversary turns out to be an opportunity for instruction.⁶¹

This dialogue with the "other" is possible because Augustine understands that there is a gap between his own apprehension of the Christian tradition and the truth of the Christian tradition: the former is partial, the latter is absolute.⁶² We must humbly accept that our grasp of the truth is always in need of further revision. And yet confidence in the tradition, not in one's own superiority, can allow for a certain dogmatic confidence about our beliefs and their importance for others.

In his article, "Pluralism, Otherness, and The Augustinian Tradition," Charles Mathewes refers to Augustine as the "master of engagement."⁶³ Mathewes argues that Augustine's theology responds to pluralism and otherness by highlighting anthropologically how the sinful self is other to itself and, theologically, God is "the absolute other."⁶⁴ Conversion is the process of ongoing struggle toward internal

⁵⁸ Augustine, *City of God* 1:35, Bettenson, p. 45, (emphasis mine).

⁵⁹ Augustine upholds the humble, crucified Christ as the most stark example of truth found where it is least expected.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* 5.8.14, Chadwick, p. 81.

⁶¹ Augustine, *City of God* 16.2, Bettenson, p. 650.

⁶² Charles T. Mathewes, "Pluralism, Otherness and The Augustinian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 14:1 (January 1990), p. 101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

integrity where a person comes to understand “the self as always already in dialogue with, and ‘possessed’ by, another—namely, God.”⁶⁵ Because the self is “anchored in the activity and presence of a ‘radical’ other, namely, the divine,”⁶⁶ selfhood is a necessarily communal discovery. This “otherness” which is central to the self is an ongoing reality as Mathewes explains:

The Augustinian tradition is particularly suited to pluralism because it affirms a conversionist theology, a theology which understands that the love of God is at best only partially and provisionally appropriated in any human life, even though it is the key to every such life. Thus no one is wholly separated from the love of God, just as no one is wholly conformed to it.⁶⁷

Thus humility brings us to recognize our partial apprehension of truth and our need for a deeper understanding. However, humility is always correlated with a confidence in the solidity of the truth that has essentially grasped us. Mathewes writes:

Confidence and humility go hand in hand, as one has both confidence in the truth of one’s claims, and humility about one’s understanding of those same claims, even as one is making them. One engages other people with both the conviction that your message is one of genuine importance to them, and the recognition that through the engagement with them you will yourself learn from them, further deepen your own understanding.⁶⁸

This illuminating application of Augustine’s understanding of humility points to the Gospel’s insistence that a Christian be open to the “stranger” for the good news is directed to “an estranged world.”⁶⁹

Given the situation of pluralism today, Augustine’s teaching can be instructive. He urges Christians to acknowledge that God’s redemptive power is not limited to the church or to an exclusive relationship with God; it essentially includes those who are “other.” Each person is somehow integral to our life’s deeper purpose and destiny. More specifically, the Augustinian tradition challenges us to see pluralism as an opportunity to dialogue and to deepen our conversion.⁷⁰

Augustinian Humility Applied to Maritain’s Democratic Citizenry

Maritain was surely more inclined than Augustine to look at how human efforts can transform the world and advance what he called, a “socio-temporal realization of Gospel truths.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, Augustine’s theologically rooted understanding of humility can be a valuable resource for Christians who hope, as Maritain did, that the “leaven of the Gospel”⁷² would awaken citizens of a democracy to what is

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

⁷¹ Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 179.

⁷² Ibid., p. 159.

“deep and lasting” in their humanity.⁷³ Contrary to many secular ethicists, Maritain maintained that the consciousness of the “Christian social” task is inseparable from the consciousness of the “Christian spiritual” task.⁷⁴ While Maritain acknowledged that natural ethics could establish important truths and provide helpful intellectual tools, he ultimately described natural ethics as “dangerously incomplete.”⁷⁵ Similar to Augustine, he insisted that “theological truths are indispensable for the full constitution of ethics and the object of morals is only adequately known in the light of these truths.”⁷⁶ Moreover, Maritain held that the “work of education, the taming of the irrational to reason, and developing the moral virtues, must constantly be pursued within the political body.”⁷⁷

In relating Christian humility to democratic citizenry, I will focus specifically on Maritain’s claim in *Education at the Crossroads*, that education and substantive public discussion are crucial to the political task of “awakening” what is deepest in humanity. Maritain believed that teachers and scholars play a central role in the formation of democratic citizens. Building upon this notion, I will offer some suggestions as to how a humble Christian citizen, particularly a humble Christian scholar, would educate and communicate with others and advance democratic principles. To illustrate these points, I will note how Maritain’s own principles and style as a political philosopher offer a powerful example of how humility can have a radical effect upon the exchange and advancement of ideas in a pluralistic setting.

In *Man and the State*, Maritain observed: “people are ordinarily distracted from their most capital aspirations and interests, as a people, by each one’s everyday business and suffering.”⁷⁸ Among such a tired and distracted people it is tempting to rally support for an idea through sheer propaganda and manipulative forms of advertising.⁷⁹ However, the real work of education must seek to convey the truth in a way that respects the dignity and God-given vocation of each individual. We must avoid the cheap “sound bite” and refrain from appeal to raw emotion if we hope for responsible participation in democratic forms of self-government.

Before considering how humility could be embodied in the work of a Christian educator, I would like to recall the way Augustine’s understanding of pride and humility emerges out of an understanding of how we stand before truth. It is in pride that a person comes to think “I have a special claim on truth.” The truth is then something “I possess,” something “I own and distribute to others” in a classroom or at a conference. Augustine’s understanding of Christian humility is based on an acknowledgment of the incompleteness of the self before truth. Marked

⁷³ Ibid., p. 137.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 229.

⁷⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), p. 165.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 165 cited in Charles A. Fecher, *The Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1953), p. 193.

⁷⁷ Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 137.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 137.

by sin, we are never absolutely immune from distorted views and practices.

Pride, according to Augustine, is the principal source of our blindness to truth. Pride infiltrates our discourse when we find ourselves needing to be the center of conversation and insist on being understood before we understand others. As teachers we may seek adulation from students and exploit their dependence on our approval. As scholars we may refuse to acknowledge our dependence on peer review and correction.

Pride even leads us to invest so much meaning in our own words that we allow our words to substitute for a real living out of the truth. Are the truths we teach in the classroom or expound in an article, the same truths that we seek to embody in our day-to-day lives? In his own teaching, Maritain insisted that the task of bringing people from false beliefs to true beliefs entails more than philosophical and theological arguments. It requires concrete deeds and signs, a true witness that is vital and visible.⁸⁰ In *The Range of Reason*, Maritain writes:

Things being as they are, it seems clear that the wisest reasonings and the most eloquent demonstrations and the best managed organizations are definitely not enough for the [people] of this time. [People] today need *signs*. They need deeds ... The faith must be an actual faith, practical and living. To believe in God must mean to live in such a manner that life could not possibly be lived if God did not exist. Then the earthly hope in the Gospel can become the quickening force of temporal history.⁸¹

At a basic level, humility involves an attitude toward scholarship which invites people to share in a truth that is infinitely shareable: a truth that is a gift, not a possession. The practice of Augustinian humility would then involve a readiness to learn from all people and even to expect that those outside our circle may have something to teach us. Augustine himself demonstrated this practice by incorporating Neoplatonic philosophy into his understanding of Christianity. Furthermore, he knew that Christianity needed philosophical resources and the human sciences to deal with the practical questions of politics and morality. In the *City of God*, for instance, he drew upon the wisdom of Cicero to formulate the proper relationship between Christians and the political order.

The humble Christian scholar would see all people as worthy of respect, even those making counter-claims to his or her own position. One would, as Augustine said: “bear with their hostility”⁸² and strive for unity wherever it can be achieved. Humble citizens would recognize that they are not God; they are not all knowing, but they depend on others to enrich their understanding of truth. The humble scholar would not dismiss his or her most hardened opponents or blithely accept the fact that many have no voice in the public sphere. Maritain himself demonstrated a genuine openness to the world in its otherness. His efforts not to dismiss others but to see the element of truth in each philosophical

⁸⁰ Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 117.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Augustine, *City of God*, 1:35, Bettenson, p. 45.

system led his biographer Charles A. Fecher to explain that “there are probably few books that he would burn.”⁸³ Maritain believed that philosophy is essentially a social task that requires the collaborative efforts of people from every nation and time. Thus he brought the wisdom of earlier masters (particularly Aquinas) as well as the insights of his wide-ranging contemporaries into his grappling with the most pressing problems of his day.

Maritain also accepted the slowness of human response in his efforts to establish world-wide unity about basic moral principles. He always guarded against the authoritarian imposition of ideas and an arbitrary dogmatism. In contributing to the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1948 he advocated practical agreement among nations locked in ideological differences. He recognized that minimal agreement was better than no agreement, given the horrors of the Second World War. Nonetheless, while advocating a practical response to pluralism, Maritain always held out hope for a deeper unity among diverse peoples based on our shared human capacity to reason and seek the truth. He never wanted politics to be reduced to questions of practical efficiency. Thus, in expressing his own reasons for human rights, Maritain sought to encourage a true pluralism whereby people of differing ideological positions would bring the full substance of their convictions into public discourse.⁸⁴

Maritain’s keen intellect and authentic humility enabled him to have an influence that extended well beyond the Catholic world. He taught at leading non-Catholic institutions—Columbia, Princeton, and the University of Chicago—and he attracted the interest of prominent Protestants, Jews, and secular philosophers throughout the world. Though widely recognized and successful, he graciously shunned public flattery and honors—even declining Pope Paul VI’s offer of the cardinalate.

Part of humility, then, is a willingness to be self-critical and to place one’s ideas before others for rigorous scrutiny as a way of being accountable and cognizant of our need for collaboration.⁸⁵ Humility fosters genuine inquiry, and a readiness to give someone yet another chance, to look again at an argument with an openness to being enlightened and perhaps corrected. But one may wonder whether this emphasis on humility fosters a style of discourse that is too “soft.” Does the practice of humility compromise the standards of rigor? Does it smooth over the sharpness of our genuine disagreements? Does it hinder real intellectual challenge and confrontation? I think the answer is no. Humility gives a Christian educator the opportunity to exercise true courage. When the ego is not at stake in weighing various

⁸³ *The Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, p. 196.

⁸⁴ Maritain, “On the Philosophy of Human Rights,” in *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, ed. UNESCO (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 72.

⁸⁵ Brian Daley’s paper, “The Pursuit of Excellence and the ‘Ordinary Manner’: Humility and the Jesuit University” delivered at Georgetown University in February, 1996, has been enormously helpful to me in its exploration of the impact that a Christologically shaped humility could have upon the academic community.

ideas, truth can be more readily identified and, in some cases, all the more unsettling, challenging, and confrontational. Because the humble place truth over self-congratulation, flattery, and worldly honors, they allow the truth to destabilize the constructions they use to possess the truth. For instance, in 1926 after Pope Pius XI's condemnation of the strongly nationalistic group *Action française*, led by Charles Maurras, Maritain admitted his mistaken sympathy for this movement and confessed his culpable negligence in failing to discern its true political purpose. Lastly, humble Christian scholars, such as Jacques Maritain, do not simply look within themselves but rely on dialogue with others and ultimately on the revelation of God for the full unfolding of truth. Maritain's consistent reliance on prayer throughout his life witnessed to his belief in humble dependence on God to promote the good.

Conclusion

In this paper I have drawn upon Augustine's understanding of humility to show how Christian citizens who cultivate a humble style of discourse, as Maritain did, could be a corrective to the pride that is not only counter-productive, but detrimental to basic democratic principles. In particular, the task of education in shaping democratic citizens is severely hampered by the predominance of pride in academic circles.

Christian humility is not proposed as a central Christian disposition only *because* it can enrich democratic education and public discourse, however. Rather, Christian humility is central because it is indispensable to human fulfillment made possible by the truth of the "humble God," (*humilis deus*)⁸⁶ Jesus Christ. It is this most profound religious truth at the heart of humility that ultimately brings success to our social and political tasks. While Christian humility is one element in a wider vision of Christian service and political engagement, it is crucial to the renewal and revitalization of education and public discourse which will advance a true democracy.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 4.8.