
READING BOTH BOOKS: REVISITING AUGUSTINE AS A MODEL FOR TEACHING RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

In this article, I consider one of the four questions explored at the Academy of Religious Leadership annual conference in April 2016, namely, “How do we, as teachers and leaders, engage sacred texts in the teaching and practice of leading?”¹ In thinking about this question, I believe Augustine’s two-book theory of the role of revelation and the role of nature offers a constructive way forward for teachers and leaders in theological education by constructively holding in tension these two primary sources.

I begin this discussion with a simple, four-part categorization of the relationship between science and religion.² My intent in offering this roadmap is to help place in context the following four different expressions: (1) antipathy, (2) indifference, (3) adoration, and (4) mutuality. I give significantly more attention to the first and last approaches, given the presenting question of textual engagement. Furthermore, I believe the first approach, antipathy, is a less constructive and more theologically problematic approach than the fourth approach, mutuality. To support this argument, I turn to the fifth-century theologian, Augustine. Finally, I outline a religious leadership lecture that I have used to help seminary students think about the sources the church can use to teach, equip, and

¹ I am grateful to the ARL Steering Committee for their diligent work in organizing this conference and for their remarkable wisdom shared throughout the development of this theme and the anticipated conversations in Chicago.

² Throughout this article, I will be using the terms *science* and *religion* to loosely name these two fields that have changed dramatically over history and that continue to change with increasing speed. Given this, *science* and *religion* are not tightly defined and are only meant to be broad descriptors of both areas of human inquiry and practice.

form men and women for ministry in the twenty-first century.

Relationship between Science and Religion

Commonly, the relationship between science and religion in the United States over the past two hundred years can be characterized by the four aforementioned groups. It is this fourth group, mutuality, that I want to strongly commend to those engaging sacred texts in the teaching and practicing of religious leadership. But before we turn to mutuality, it is instructive to touch on the three other groups, in part, to lift up the ways in which these approaches are insufficient to the task.

Antipathy

Several areas in science and religion are illustrative of their antipathy, but one of the fiercest and longest-fought battles is between creation and evolution. Interestingly, it did not start this way. Before helping the captain on the *Beagle* voyage that launched Darwin's biology, Charles Darwin studied at Christ's College, Cambridge, to become a priest in the Church of England. Throughout Darwin's life, he grappled with the possible implications of his findings for the church. Even at his death, his theory of evolution was tentatively accepted by some Church of England leaders. At his funeral, held in Westminster Abbey, the Reverend Frederic Farrar compared Darwin's scientific genius to that of Isaac Newton and went further to say that Darwin's theory was quite consistent with an elevated sense of the actions of the Creator in the natural world.

In 1869, Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* and, two years later, published *The Descent of Man*. The responses, both scientific and theological, were complex. The three important features of Darwin's evolutionary principles were (1) common ancestry, (2) speciation through variation, and (3) natural selection. Briefly, common ancestry holds that all species in existence today originate from a single ancient organism or a small number of ancient organisms. Second,

species are developed through the variation of forms, organs, and instincts, and these variations are random. Finally, natural selection is the mechanism for speciation; useful variations promote survival and favor reproduction and are, thus, passed on to more progeny. In other words, useful variations are “selected for.”

These three features of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution impacted theology in several important areas. The theological argument from design, upon which so much of English religion was built, was undermined by the notion of random variations and natural selection. The design argument points to the appearance of design or purpose in the natural world and, thus, there is a designer. At issue is the doctrine of Divine Providence (both general and special). For some theologians, if species can develop naturally without the need for special providence (that is, individual creation by God), then it calls into question God’s activity in creation. Because of this contradiction, Princeton Seminary professor Charles Hodge (1797–1878) equated Darwinism with atheism since the design argument was undermined by random variation.

Ethics and mortalism were other areas of Christian doctrine that were impacted. On an ethical level, survival of the fittest was seen as undercutting morality in human relations. If the premise is that God individually creates each person *and* survival of the fittest is true (God’s desire), then many biblical reversals are called into question (i.e., “the last will be first, and the first will be last,” Matt. 20:16). Regarding Christian mortalism, the origin of humans from lower organisms was seen as materialistic, if exception was not made for the soul. The central concern for mortalists is whether the soul is inherently immortal. If, however, species are only material, then what is the soul?

The most significant and longest-lasting concern that continues to today was the impact on biblical authority, specifically in terms of the historicity of Genesis 1–3. While this was not the main contention in the nineteenth century, it has come to the forefront of opposition in the twentieth

century with the development of creationism. *Creationism* can refer to any of a variety of religious oppositions to evolution. The basic premise of creationism is that human beings and all other species were each created separately and, in their current form, supernaturally by God. The biblical basis for this is found in Genesis when the texts are read literally.

Religious leaders were significantly divided in their reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Some saw evolution as consistent with a divine plan and even as proof of divine purpose in the creation (e.g., "programmed into" creation). Some found in the theory support for the biblical teaching that all humankind had a common ancestor (*monogenism*). Others used it to support *polygenism* (multiple origins of humanity), which in turn, supported racism and colonialism through survival of the fittest. Liberal theologians used the theory to express their progressiveness and to distinguish themselves from conservatives, who stuck to biblical literalism. And biblical literalists used the theory as a foil to reinforce religious identity through opposition, perhaps even more than through theological principles.

This major issue of biblical authority is of such a magnitude that it warrants further exploration before turning to the other three relationship types (indifference, adoration, and mutuality). Again, the central question of this article is, "How do we, as teachers and leaders, engage sacred texts in the teaching and practice of leading?" Underlying this engagement is the teacher and the leader's understanding of the residency of biblical³ authority, just as it is for the science and religion debate. Of course biblical authority (and scientific authority) is at play in all four relationship types,

³ The question posed at ARL rightly uses the language of "sacred texts." In this article, though, the canonical texts of the Old and New Testaments as understood in the Reformed tradition are used exclusively. There might be the case that this residence question is applicable to other religious traditions and their sacred texts, but the reader is better qualified to make this judgment.

but the lines of distinction are most clearly seen in this first type: antipathy.

A basic way to think about the residence of biblical authority is to think about it as either inherent or ascribed. One way to think about authority is to consider the president of the United States. The president's authority comes from two primary sources: inherent and ascribed. Inherent authority is granted by the office itself. For instance, presidents exercise veto control regarding legislation from the moment they step into the office until the day they depart. This inherent authority, granted by the office, is independent to the person holding the office and remains constant over the person's term. By contrast, the ascribed authority of the president waxes and wanes with his or her ability to influence others. One way we try to measure this influence is with approval ratings; the higher the rating is, the higher the ascribed authority the president can command.

One example where presidents retain inherent authority but lose nearly all of their ascribed authority is when they are considered lame ducks. During the intervening months between the fall election and the inauguration of a new president, the president has little authority to influence legislation and public debate, or to begin new initiatives, even though he or she retains the inherent authority of the office. In this way, authority is certified by the office (e.g., the inherent power to veto) and also embodied by the individual (e.g., a person's influential capacity).

If we think of authority on the objective/subjective spectrum, biblical authority as inherent to the book is situated at the objective end; authority resides within the book itself regardless of what any person believes. At the subjective end is a reader-ascribed authority; authority is ascribed to the text as the reader grants it.

In a Sunday school class a few years ago, I prepared a lesson plan to illustrate the inherency idea of authority by ripping a page out of the Bible. So, as I talked with the class about biblical authority, I opened the Bible and tore out a

blank page between the Old and New Testaments. One wise woman sitting in the front row gasped in horror, which prompted me to run over quickly, face reddening from her alarm, and confess my deception, showing her that the page was blank. Clearly for her, I was at a minimum being disrespectful to the Bible and, at most, was tearing God's Word. On reflection about that moment, it is not as interesting that someone audibly gasped, but that I cannot bring myself to tear an actual page of Scripture out of the Bible. Perhaps I love books too much to do so—especially the Bible. And maybe there is a part of my understanding that holds biblical authority as a property of the book itself.

Another contemporary illustration of viewing the biblical authority as inherent to the book can be found in a scene from the movie *The Apostle*, where the small Pentecostal country church holds a bake sale to raise money.⁴ It is a bright and warm spring morning when the members of the church are putting out the cakes for sale. But driving up the road on a large bulldozer is an angry cowboy (played by Billy Bob Thornton), who is going to “take that church out.” Earlier in the movie, preacher Euliss “Sonny” Dewey (played by Robert Duvall) had beaten up the cowboy for interrupting an evening worship service with his vulgarity. When Sonny sees the bulldozer turn toward the church, he automatically picks up his worn Bible sitting on a chair at the cake auction and places himself between the bulldozer and the church building.

“I’ll tell you right now. See this? You see this?” asked Sonny, holding up the Bible above the raised bulldozer blade.

“Yeah, I see that book.”

“I opened that to the ninety-first Psalm. ‘He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide in the Shadow of the Almighty.’” And with a chorus of “Amens,” Sonny kneels down and places his Bible between

⁴ *The Apostle*, Universal Pictures, 1997.

himself and the bulldozer, still open to Psalm 91. Looking up, Sonny continues, “If you wanna have to go to that church, you’ll have to go over that Holy Book first. And brother, if you do, I don’t wanna sit where you are sitting right now, no, no, no.”

The confrontation builds with the cowboy feeling threatened and getting off the bulldozer while demanding Sonny move the Bible. “You move that Bible, you move that Bible right now!” But no one, including one of the cowboy’s friends, will touch the Bible, let alone move it. In the end, not even the cowboy himself will move “that book,” but he is the one who does finally touch it. Kneeling before it, with Sonny right beside him, the cowboy, with tears in his eyes, puts his hand on the open pages—reaching out for the “Lord’s acceptance.” In this poignant scene, the book itself holds the authority. It stops the cowboy from bulldozing the church, and it is the touchstone by which faith is received. Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof states that the Bible “is our appointed meeting place with God, where we expect in faith that God will speak to us.”⁵

If the Bible’s authority is solely an inherent property of the book, it would help explain why the book has remained relatively intact for more than sixteen centuries. Yet, when carried to the extreme, the church would need the original texts themselves to gain its full authority. In other words, any copy, variant, or translation would only be a copy, which would lessen the Bible’s authority. Perhaps we ought to be thankful that the New Testament writers wrote in a different language than Jesus spoke and, thereby, eliminated any possibility we might retrieve Jesus’ actual words.⁶

⁵ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 94.

⁶ Interestingly, there are several places in the New Testament where the writer offers the original spoken language, such as Jesus’ last words on the cross, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34) and the raising from the dead of Jairus’s daughter, where Jesus says, “Talitha cum,” and the young girl immediately got up and began to walk about (Mark 5:42). Perhaps the writers

Understanding biblical authority as a property of the book raises several difficult issues. One issue is the distribution of this property within the text. In other words, is the Bible uniformly authoritative? Should we read Leviticus 20, which is a listing of sins that are punishable by death, with equal significance as Luke 24:1–12, the discovery of the empty tomb? Does the angel's proclamation, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5), hold equal authority to the holiness code? Berkhof argues against understanding the Bible's authority as a uniform property, stating, "The Bible is not a totally uniform authoritative book. It is not a photo but a film, not a law but a way."⁷ This *film* or *way* (at least in the Reformed tradition) is the Christian journey, which then points to the idea that Scripture's authority does indeed have something to do with us.

At my church, we have a Thursday lunchtime Bible study that consists of mostly retired men and women, each of whom brings their Bible from home. Some of the attendees have been Presbyterians all their lives and, accordingly, many bring their *Revised Standard Version* and a few bring the *New Revised Standard Version*. What is interesting, however, is the diversity of other translations and paraphrases represented. Some bring the *New International Version* or the *King James*, while others bring paraphrases like the *Living Bible* or *The Message*. When asked why they think we use so many different Bibles, one responded, "This version just feels comfortable. I can understand it better, and it speaks to me." Certainly everyone in the class, including the teacher, would say that the Bible, in whatever translation or paraphrase, is authoritative in their lives. But the fact that we bring more

thought that the actual words themselves, when uttered by Jesus, had the power to save.

⁷ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 94.

than a half dozen versions speaks to the power of personal preference.

An example of this ascribed authority in worship comes from a Presbyterian church outside Philadelphia in the early 1990s. At that time, the liturgy would include a Scripture reading, called “The Biblical Witness,” along with a “Modern Witness.” In other words, the preacher would provide the biblical text and the non-biblical text from which to preach, laid side by side. Consequently, a quote from Teresa of Avila, Mark Twain, or Martin Luther King, Jr., accompanied the Bible reading. This practice of reading a modern witness speaks against the Bible holding sole authority to convey God’s Word and suggests that we can ascribe authority to any number of texts from which to preach. If we can ascribe authority to the Bible, then we can ascribe it to other texts as well, as was this congregation’s practice.

While it is useful to conceptualize biblical authority using the dichotomy of objective and subjective knowing, the two-pole contrast is inadequate. Dichotomies are static, whereas the Word of God is dynamic. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that “the Bible always and inescapably outdistances our categories of understanding and explanation, of interpretation and control. Because the Bible is ‘the live word of the living God,’ it will not compliantly submit to the accounts we prefer to give of it.”⁸ Thus, our objective and subjective accounts are incomplete. More importantly, Scripture’s authority is better described as a communication within the Christian pilgrimage, an awareness that is gained along the faith journey.

The faith journey is not just ours but also the journey of those described in the biblical text; the Bible weaves the faith journeys of those who came before with our lives of faith today. Consequently, biblical authority is realized in these connections and not in appealing arbitrarily to the

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, “A Personal Reflection Biblical Authority,” *The Christian Century* 118(1) (2001): 14.

texts outside their contexts (such as randomly opening the Bible and pointing to a text for guidance). Again, according to Berkhof: “The authority is not found in a particular snapshot on that way, but in the way itself. We cannot randomly appeal to texts outside their contexts, but must see their place on the way.”⁹ The way is essential to understanding how Scripture can be authoritative.

The Bible is better described as a communication within the Christian pilgrimage, a dynamic communication that is personal. It is a communication with a speaker and a listener, with the speaker being the Spirit of God, the hearer being humankind, and the pilgrimage being the Christian journey. We need the communicator, God; the medium, the biblical witness; and the addressee, the worshipping community, in order to become aware of Scripture’s authority. Authority, in this way, is recognized because the Bible is the divinely chosen medium for the encounter. The encounter is meeting God in the reading and hearing of the biblical text. The encounter is experienced acutely when the Bible, even if read previously, speaks directly to our minds and hearts. There we hear the living word of God. As John Calvin observed, “The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”¹⁰ And this is at the center of the Reformed tradition’s idea of biblical authority, namely, God’s accommodation to humanity.

Augustine, bishop of the North African city of Hippo Regius, attempted to write a literal commentary on Genesis, beginning in A.D. 388. This attempt, though, left Augustine exhausted or, in his words, “I collapsed under the weight of a burden I could not bear. Before completing even one

⁹ Berkhof, 94.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 79.

book, I gave up a task that was too much for me.”¹¹ This endeavor, though, brought Augustine to conclude that it is God who accommodates us with the Bible. “We can safely follow Scripture, which proceeds at the pace of a mother stooping to her child, so to speak, so as not to leave us behind in our weakness.”¹² God accommodates us, in our weakness, in any way that God desires. And God freely chooses language, first oral and then written, to provide us with “the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal.”¹³

Calvin, adding to this idea of accommodation, asserts that language (form) was always subordinate to content (function), namely, that the form of human language did nothing to inhibit the communication of the divine message. Imperfect human language is the divinely chosen vehicle by which God reveals the knowledge of providence after Christ’s ascension. Similarly, Karl Barth succinctly states that it is the Word (Incarnation) behind the words (Scripture).¹⁴ For Barth, God is the sole initiator in revealing to us truth through the faith that we receive from God, through the confirmation of that faith in Scripture, and in the exercise of worship of God. So the Bible, as our appointed meeting place with God, is an ordinary book made extra-ordinary, even miraculous, by God; “the miracle which has to take place if the Bible is to rise up and speak to us as the Word of God has always to consist in an awakening and strengthening of our faith.”¹⁵ Therefore, when we attempt to locate where the Bible’s authority resides (in the book itself or within us), we have no precision. This is good news

¹¹ Augustine in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Literal Meaning of Genesis, vol. 1*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 2.

¹² Augustine, *On Genesis in the Literal Sense*, Book 3, Section 6, in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.xxi.4*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 924.

¹³ *Book of Order* (Louisville, Ken.: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2005), W-4.4003(b).

¹⁴ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, 2/1, §19* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980).

¹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics, 2/1, 512*.

because we can neither contain nor control the ways in which God breaks forth in our lives through the biblical witness.

For more than a century in the United States, antipathy between science and religion has taken various expressions and continues to be a dominant approach. One of the major contributing factors to this antipathy is the authority of the Bible in the realm of science. This antipathy, however, is not only a modern expression but an ancient one. Christians have long wrestled with what they know from nature and what they know from faith (Rom. 8:18–25; Heb. 11:1–3). Before further exploring this ongoing struggle, I briefly outline two other approaches of indifference and adoration.

Indifference

A second approach science and religion can take with each other is to simply ignore one another. Admittedly, this attitude has received a lot less attention in the media, but it is likely the most widely used. For instance, the famous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 would never have made the town of Dayton, Tennessee, famous if the two sides had ignored each other. The trial was actually a setup, in part, for publicity for Dayton (contrary to dramatic depictions in film and on stage, “Inherit the Wind”). The idea of a trial began with the American Civil Liberties Union seeking a case against the Tennessee Butler Act (enacted in 1925). So the Dayton town leaders asked a teacher, John T. Scopes, if he would be willing to stand as a defendant to start the case (Scopes was actually the Rhea County High School’s football coach and a substitute teacher). The town’s business leaders hoped the trial would bring publicity and visitors to the struggling town, and so the trial was as much a traveling circus as it was a trial. In the end, Scopes was convicted and fined \$100. Again, if both sides had ignored one another, such a spectacle never would have taken place.

There are likely many reasons people prefer to have the two sides ignore each other, such as avoidance of conflict, a misunderstanding of the issues involved, good manners, or

the chilling effect the Scopes trial had on society for decades. (The Tennessee law was not overturned until 1967 by the U.S. Supreme Court.) Regardless of the reason, many choose to stay on the sidelines when science and religion seemingly conflict. Most people don't discuss vaccinations or global warming with family and friends, even though both topics are regularly in the news.

Adoration

A third attitude is that of adoration, and it is often expressed by religion for science. One reason for these moments of adulation is that science has seemingly confirmed an important theological position or doctrine. This was the case in 1951 (prior to broad acceptance of the big bang theory), when Pope Pius XII hailed it as unveiling the secrets of nature and, thereby, disclosing the creative work of God. For Pius, the significance of the big bang theory lay in the testimony it gave to the creation in time already available from divine revelation. For many Christians, science had finally caught up with the church in affirming *creation ex nihilo* with its theory of the big bang. This third approach is one where there is a wholesale acceptance or overreach from one domain into the other.¹⁶ This love affair, though, tightly links the two in a way that can ultimately diminish one (or both). For instance, what is the church to say if cosmologists expand or reduce the theory of the big bang that is theologically unappealing? If the church is lauding science when it confirms doctrine, the

¹⁶ This example of adoration for science is not typified broadly in the Roman Catholic Church today. In 1998, Pope John Paul II issued an important encyclical titled *Fides et ratio* (Faith and Reason) that underlines the clear need for both faith and reason (including science), which it calls the “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” Faith held simply and without the exercise of reason is condemned and “runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition.” Likewise, unaided human reason is unable to attain or to prove the ultimate truths of existence; these are revealed through faith in the Christian revelation. (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, The Holy See, 1998.)

church puts itself in a bind when science contradicts doctrine.

The love affair can also go from science to religion. One expression of this is the “god of the gaps,” which points to the gaps in our knowledge and fills them with God. Historically, some scientists, who belong to various faith traditions, have done just this. The adoration is less about confirming God with what we know, but confirming faith with what we do not (yet) know. The inherent problem with this approach is the ever-expanding breadth of human knowledge and, consequently, the ever-changing (perhaps diminishing) understanding of God. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed:

...how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge. If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we don't know.¹⁷

Bonhoeffer's statement about finding God in what we know is a nice segue to the fourth relationship between science and religion.

Mutuality

Unlike indifference, this final approach of mutuality advocates engagement but with neither antipathy nor adoration.¹⁸ This approach asserts that science and religion are asking different types of questions and have different immediate sources but the same ultimate Source. This is the

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Letter to Eberhard Bethge, 29 May 1944,” *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (Touchstone, 1997), 310–312.

¹⁸ Mutuality is similar to integration, but it retains the knowledge boundaries of each sphere. For more information about an integrative approach, see Richard Langer, “The Discourse of Faith and Learning,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief*, 16(2) (2012): 159–177.

thrust of Augustine's argument for mutuality, namely, two books, same Author. The different types of questions each book addresses are, simplistically, science asking the *how* questions of existence, and religion asking the *why* and the *who* questions of existence. One way to frame mutuality theologically is through general and special revelation. The doctrine of general revelation posits that God reveals through what God has made (see John 1:14). "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork," writes the Psalmist (Psalms 19:1).¹⁹ The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans that "Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom. 1:20). As the name implies, general revelation is pervasive in creation.²⁰ Special revelation, though, is God's revelation as attested to in Scripture, namely, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this mutuality approach, God is revealed in our scientific *how* questions (general revelation) and in our religious *who* and *why* questions (special revelation). One expression of this mutuality comes from Bishop Augustine of Hippo, to whom we now turn our full attention.²¹

Augustine's Two Book Theory

Albert Outler (translator and editor) begins his introduction to Augustine's *Confession* stating, "Like a colossus bestriding two worlds, Augustine stands as the last patristic and the first medieval father of Western Christianity...The center of his 'system' is in the Holy Scriptures, as they ordered and moved his heart and mind. It

¹⁹ All scriptural quotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

²⁰ John Calvin concludes that "there is within the human mind and by natural instinct an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.3.1.

²¹ Science as is practice was not a discipline or a practice during the patristic period. Nevertheless, Augustine was acutely interested in the relationship between Christianity and the exploration of the natural world through investigation and philosophy.

was in Scripture that, first and last, Augustine found the focus of his religious authority.”²² Without question, Augustine’s view of Scripture is that it is God’s way of accommodating us in our weakness, again as “a mother stooping to her child, so to speak, so as not to leave us behind in our weakness.”²³ Augustine, though, did not attempt to substitute faith through Scripture with reason. For Augustine, philosophical thought was not to be replaced or repudiated but to be understood through the lens of Christianity. In other words, faith and reason are two means of obtaining knowledge. This is Augustine’s Two Book theory: the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature.

Augustine was born and grew up in North Africa. His mother, Monica, was Christian and his father, Patricius, was pagan. As a young man, Augustine utterly rejected Christianity, much to his mother’s dismay. He thought Christianity’s teachings were either tenuous and uncertain or completely illogical. Furthermore, he found the Bible to be full of contradictions and nonsense. When Augustine was twenty-nine, he left Africa for Italy to develop professionally. While teaching rhetoric in Milan, he met the Bishop of Milan, Ambrose. In the opening of *The Confessions*, Augustine prays, “I will seek thee, O Lord, and call upon thee. I call upon thee, O Lord, in my faith which thou hast given me, which thou hast inspired in me through the humanity of thy Son, and through the ministry of thy preacher.”²⁴ This preacher is believed to be Ambrose, who baptized Augustine at age thirty-three, just a few months before Monica died. Pivotal to Augustine’s conversion was the study of classical philosophers (particularly

²² Albert Cook Outler, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), v.

²³ Augustine, *On Genesis in the Literal Sense*, Book 3, Section 6, in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xxi.4, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 924.

²⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), v.

Neoplatonist), where he found an intellectual approach to Christianity. Furthermore, he found a biblical exegesis method, which allowed him to think critically about the Scriptures.

From this background, he began to develop the idea that there are two books, the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature.²⁵ Fundamentally, Augustine argues over and over again that these two books are complementary because this is how God has chosen to be revelatory to humanity. Augustine does not come to this conclusion lightly. He himself had been taken in by “the fantasies of the Manicheans” in his quest for God and clearly denounced their dualistic concept. One reason for his denial of Manichaeism is its insistence that nature itself is inherently evil. In a significant way, the Manicheans, with their strong gnostic thought, had antipathy for the Book of Nature. But Augustine understood that the Author for both books was the very same. And if God is the Author of both books, ultimately, they cannot contradict one another. The central theological shift that Augustine adds to the conversation is that neither book is the Source, but only God. As Augustine writes poetically in his *Confessions*:

²⁵ Augustine is not the first to conceive of multiple avenues for God’s revelation. “The importance of examining creation to understand the character and attributes of God is an ancient religious theme that informally reaches back to Rabbinic Judaism, as well as to earlier Ancient Israelite religious expression. The concept of ‘thinking back’ from nature to God also draws on the Greek Platonic and Aristotelian traditions of reasoning by starting with the order of nature in order to then establish the character of divine beings or, in Plato’s case, of ideal forms. The traditional Christian view of creation builds on its Jewish heritage and its Hellenistic context, while also elaborating the concept of the Word (Logos) as the means through which physical creation is brought into being. The logos of scripture is thus conceptually linked to the physical world, which is also interpreted as a form of divine speech or divine text.” Rebecca Gould, “Book of Nature,” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. By Bron Taylor (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 211.

O Truth, Truth, how inwardly even then did the marrow of my soul sigh for thee when, frequently and in manifold ways, in numerous and vast books, [the Manicheans] sounded out thy name though it was only a sound! And in these dishes—while I starved for thee—they served up to me, in thy stead, the sun and moon thy beauteous works—but still only thy works and not thyself; indeed, not even thy first work. For thy spiritual works came before these material creations, celestial and shining though they are. But I was hungering and thirsting, not even after those first works of thine, but after thyself the Truth, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”²⁶

Certainly we, too, only truly hunger for God, “thyself the Truth.”

Many theological educators today, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, appreciate Augustine for his theological perspectives, particularly his understanding of the authority of Scripture. I certainly do. Augustine, though, has even more to offer to the conversation concerning our sources for teaching religious leadership because he was concerned with the same question, namely, the relationship between faith and reason. Augustine’s intellectual challenges to understanding were not replaced at his baptism by his Christian faith but, rather, continued throughout his entire life. He deeply believed that reason is required for faithful theological inquiry. One example of Augustine’s passion about the necessity of reason in faith comes from a letter he wrote to Consentius:

You say that truth is to be grasped more by faith than by reason....Heaven forbid that God should hate in us that by which he made us superior to the other animals! Heaven forbid that we should believe in such a way as not to accept or seek reasons, since we could

²⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 37.

not even believe if we did not possess rational souls. Therefore, in certain matters pertaining to the doctrine of salvation that we cannot yet grasp by reason—though one day we shall be able to do so—faith must precede reason and purify the heart and make it fit to receive and endure the great light of reason; and this is surely something reasonable.²⁷

Throughout Augustine's life as a bishop in North Africa, he put to work considerable portions of Greek natural philosophy (particularly Platonic) in understanding God and God's revelation to humanity. Augustine, the colossus standing between two worlds, formed an insightful synthesis between Greek philosophical thought and Christian belief and, thus, created a theology and method that is insightful to the Academy's discussion of how we engage sacred texts in the teaching and practice of religious leadership. Therefore, what follows is a brief overview of Augustine's thought on science and Christianity.

Doctrine of Unity of Truth

The first point, and maybe the most startling, is Augustine's doctrine of the unity of truth. Fundamental to this doctrine is that the unity of truth is not *unity of knowledge* or *unity of method*; only truth has unity. In other words, theology does not hold one truth and science another, even though each has its own set of knowledge and methods. For Augustine, theology and natural knowledge contribute to humanity's understanding of truth. The implication of this unity, for Augustine, was that we cannot and should not ignore seeming contradictions between what we discover in nature or in theology. Augustine believed that the contradictions were only in appearance, not in substance, because there is only one truth. Therefore, every contradiction between science and Christianity must be resolved intellectually with reason. Consequently, in

²⁷ Augustine, "Letter 20," in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 34, ed. A. Goldbacher (Vienna: Tempsky, 1895), 708.

Augustine's commentary on Genesis, he writes: "We should always observe that restraint that is proper to a devout and serious person and on an obscure question entertain no rash belief. Otherwise, if the evidence later reveals the explanation, we are likely to despise it because of our attachment to our error, even though this explanation may not be in any way opposed to the sacred writings."²⁸ I have often wondered if our reluctance to engage scientific findings on religious grounds is due, in part, to "our attachment to our error."

Interpretation of Both Books

The field of biblical interpretation is enormous and expanding all the time. In the sciences, however, *interpretation* is the word of choice. Scientific knowledge is certainly expanding, even exponentially, but not because we generally think of it as an interpretive exercise.²⁹ This was particularly the case from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s with the development of the hard sciences. Physics, chemistry, astronomy, and so on were considered "hard" because they simply described what is seemingly objectively. In the 1950s, that began to change. As Craig Van Gelder has noted:

Everyone relies on some type of method to learn anything. But what is becoming increasingly clear today, is that there is a hermeneutically shaped character to the methods that we employ. The use of any method to learn something always involves two types of interpretation. First, there are interpretive assumptions we hold about what constitutes reality

²⁸ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten et al. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 2.18.1.

²⁹ In 2004, the *Journal of Religious Leadership* (vol. 3, nos. 1 and 2) published a double edition focusing on the theological and philosophical underpinnings of interpretation. Two articles of particular relevance for this discussion are "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics" by Craig Van Gelder and "Getting Our Bearings: A Schema for Three Ways of Knowing" by David G. Forney.

that influences the method we use. Second, the information that we learn through the use of any particular method is always interpreted through the lenses of these same assumptions. This means that epistemology is inseparably linked to hermeneutics.³⁰

An example for physics comes from what is now referred to as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. In 1958, this principle radically changed our understanding of the relationship between the scientific observer and what is being observed in nature.³¹ Heisenberg concluded, "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning."³²

Remarkably, Augustine wrote extensively about our acquisition of natural and biblical knowledge through the senses. This is not to say that Augustine was the precursor to modern physics, but he did vehemently argue that the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture require careful

³⁰ Craig Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, vol. 3, 1/2 (Spring and Fall 2004), 44.

³¹ "Heisenberg demonstrated his uncertainty principle by proposing, by way of an ideal or 'thought' experiment, a remarkably uncomplicated mental image. At the Copenhagen Conference he asked his audience of leading scientists from around the world to imagine someone holding a gun in his hand. With this gun the person is able to 'shoot' a single electron into a dark chamber that is totally empty of all other atoms, even those of air. An observer of this process has an ideal 'microscope' with which the movement of the electron through the dark chamber can be observed by directing a single photon of light onto it. (At least one photon of light is necessary or it couldn't be observed). What happens, however, as Heisenberg explained, is that the photon, as it strikes the electron, throws it out of its predicted path of movement. 'By the very act of lighting up the electron's movement, that movement would be disrupted' (Moore, 1966, p. 151). From this, the conclusion is that it is impossible both to see the electron and to measure its velocity. At best, the observer would be able to calculate from the observational data 'the probability of its being in a certain approximate area' (Moore, 1966, p. 152)." Daniel D. Tranel, "A Lesson From the Physicists," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 59 (1981): 426.

³² Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row: 1958), 58.

interpretation.³³ In other words, Augustine contended that we should not accept scientific or biblical knowledge uncritically; rather, we must diligently apply reason to achieve a correct interpretation.

In biblical interpretation, Augustine recognized that passages have layered meanings. For example, he understood that texts have literal, allegorical, anagogical, and moral meanings. So *Jerusalem* could mean the city in Palestine (literal), the hidden church (allegory), or the human soul (moral). An illustration of layered meanings comes from Augustine's *Literal Interpretation of Genesis* in which he denies a six-day time frame (even a six-period time frame of any kind) for God's creative acts.³⁴ Added to these layers is the reality that their meaning is obscured by human words, expressed by human writers. All this complexity to the biblical exegesis moved Augustine toward the doctrine of accommodation. Understanding the biblical text requires God's involvement, or we are completely left behind (as was previously noted). Even so, Augustine found some biblical passages to be so incredibly difficult to understand that our exegesis of them should be held provisionally.

When comparing knowledge gathered from nature with biblical knowledge, Augustine thought it easier to substantiate scientific findings than interpretations of specific biblical passages. Perhaps this conclusion was drawn from the fact that humanity's knowledge of nature was so limited in Augustine's day, but I would contend that it remains easier to validate scientific findings than to achieve consensus on biblical interpretation. More pertinent for us today, though, is Augustine's conviction that our biblical interpretations must be informed by validated scientific findings and knowledge gathered in other areas of study.

³³ I believe Augustine would have applauded our modern scientific method as an appropriate way to interpret the Book of Nature.

³⁴ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten et al. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), chap. 13.

Moreover, Christians should not be ill-informed of scientific outcomes; otherwise, we open the faith to ridicule for being unlearned, and the gospel is heard as nonsense. According to Augustine:

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds as certain from reason and experience. Now it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.³⁵

Augustine's own writings are full of scientific information gleaned from his study of classical sources and from his own observations in nature. Augustine was broadly educated in the liberal arts and sciences (of the day) and even developed his own educational program that included mathematics and mathematical sciences as studies preparatory to philosophy.³⁶ Moreover, he talked of writing a curriculum that included arithmetic, geometry, music, and the elements of philosophy.³⁷

³⁵ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten et al. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 1.19.39.

³⁶ See Augustine, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil: A Translation of St. Augustine's De Ordine*, trans. Robert P. Russell (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, LLC).

³⁷ See Augustine, *The Retractions (Fathers of the Church Patristic Series)*, trans. Sr. Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968).

If it sounds like Augustine held both sets of knowledge on the same level, that would be a misreading of Augustinian thought. He ardently believed that religious knowledge is principal and scientific knowledge is *ancilla* (“handmaiden”). In other words, scientific knowledge at best only assists true religion. As *ancilla*, our findings in nature are key elements that reveal the majesty of what God creates. Nevertheless, they are indispensable for correct biblical exegesis.

Augustine recognized that the relationship between science and religion is complex. This complexity can be summarized by two phrases that stand in tension: *Credo ut intellegam* (“I believe so that I may understand”) and *Intellego ut credam* (“I understand so that I may believe”). These two terms come from one of Augustine’s sermons, but the phrases and the tension they hold when coupled appear recurrently in his writings. For Augustine, the two are inseparable; paradoxically, we cannot do one without the other, he believed. Like the hermeneutical circle, each one builds on the other without ever giving either one preference. In this way, they are mutually correcting, helping us attain *recta ratio* and *recta fides*—“right reason” and “right faith.”

Application: Social Science and the Laying On of Hands

Following Augustine’s lead, we are encouraged to engage sacred texts in the teaching and practice of leading through the full involvement of lively biblical exegesis and leading-edge social science. This involvement means at least that faith and reason both contribute to understanding religious leadership and, consequently, there is not one truth for theology and another for social sciences. When contradictions occur between theology and social science findings, we must work diligently to resolve them through the use of reason. Additionally, we require God’s help in understanding biblical texts, which are more difficult to interpret than the Book of Nature but must be informed by the most up-to-date scientific findings. Ultimately, scientific

knowledge is *ancilla* to biblical exegesis. Yielding correct interpretations of both books requires the diligent work of reason; interpretations of some particularly difficult biblical passages are to be held provisionally. Inherent in this two-book approach is the mutually correcting *credo ut intellegam* and *intellego ut credam* that helps us achieve right reason and right faith.

As an illustrative example, consider Moses, whose leadership is described as follows. “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut. 34:10-11).

Without question, by the power of God, Moses’ leadership brings liberation from Egypt for the Hebrew people, and he is a gifted leader. As Walter Brueggemann notes, Moses’ leadership is

a radical break with the social reality of Egypt. The newness and radical innovativeness of Moses...cannot be extrapolated from any earlier reality. The appearance of a new social reality is unprecedented. That new social reality drives us to the category of revelation. Israel can only be understood in terms of the new call of God and his assertion of an alternative social reality. Prophecy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social political reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause.³⁸

Because of the outcomes of Moses’ leadership with the Hebrews, many examples are available that we can use and learn from when thinking and practicing religious leadership

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 6.

today. One of those areas is succession planning when an effective leader leaves his or her position.

At the end of Moses' life, the succession plan was a commissioning service. The LORD said to Moses, "Your time to die is near; call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him" (Deut. 31:14). Joshua was to be the new leader of the Hebrews as they crossed the Jordan and began inhabiting the Promised Land. This succession story richly conveys God's activity in religious leadership and is liturgically practiced in a majority of Christian denominations through the laying on of hands during ordination and installation services. In Moses' case, "Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9).

Today, most denominations use a wide variety of discernment processes to recognize who has the wisdom and requisite skills to serve as a religious leader, understanding that ordinands need more than the laying on of hands in a worship service.³⁹ Consequently, several fields in the social sciences are incorporated in these discernment processes, with leadership studies playing an increasing role.

During the first half of the twentieth century, leadership research focused heavily on traits. The need for effective leaders, especially in the massive war effort, prompted the search for the requisite traits that would help quickly identify candidates to serve as officers.⁴⁰ Over the course of this research, several traits were carefully explored, including intelligence, energy and self-confidence levels, honesty, dominance, motivation to lead, emotional stability, integrity,

³⁹ To a certain degree, this observation even includes non-programmed Quakers. See Thomas H. Jeavons, "Doing the Unspeakable: Identifying, Developing, and Supporting Leadership Among Quakers," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, vol. 5, nos. 1/2 (Spring and Fall 2006).

⁴⁰ See Bernard M. Bass and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 2008).

and achievement need. From this work, we learned there are great limitations to both identifying what these specific traits are and how to accurately measure these traits in individuals. One of the reasons for the difficulty in mapping leadership traits is that leadership is context dependent. Different traits are required for different settings. In looking at the story of Moses with this trait approach, we also see that he is not likely to have some of these traits when reading chapters three and four of Exodus. Nevertheless, even a tentative list of traits that are associated with good leaders is one helpful tool for leadership discerning. In a similar fashion, wisdom can be gained from other social science theories of leadership, such as Fiedler's contingency theory or Robert House's pathgoal theory.⁴¹ Today the importance of cultures and their impact on leadership is just beginning to be identified. Again, all these studies ought to be well understood and carefully thought through when developing and reviewing current discernment processes for religious leadership so that when we lay on hands and pray for a

⁴¹ For Fiedler's contingency theory, see F. E. Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); and F. E. Fiedler, "The Contingency Model and the Dynamics of the Leadership Process," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 11, ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1978). For goal-path theory, see R. J. House and G. Dessler, "The Path-Goal Theory of Leadership: Some *post hoc* and *a priori* Test" in *Contingency Approaches to Leadership*, eds. J. G. Hunt and L. L. Larson (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974); and J. C. Wofford and L. Z. Liska, "Path-Goal Theories of Leadership: A Meta-Analysis of Leadership," *Journal of Management*, vol. 19 (1993): 857–876. Like the leadership trait research, these theories also have significant limitations. Later research has shown an implicit gender bias in many leadership models. Consequently, important research on the similarities and differences between effective leadership, including women and men, has concluded that women tend to be more participatory, or democratic, than men. For more information, see A. H. Eagley and B. T. Johnson, "Gender and Leadership Style: A Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 108 (1990): 233–256. For a recent experimental study on leadership and gender, see Philip J. Grossman, Mana Komai, and James E. Jensen, "Leadership and Gender in Groups: An Experiment," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 48(1) (February 2015): 368–388.

particular leader, he or she has received the best formation possible to serve the people of God.

These simple examples of social science leadership research are offered as tools that would add to the discernment process that already includes prayer, lengthy examination, and theological education. It is this mutuality of including the Book of Nature (in this case, social science findings) with the biblical witness that Augustine advocates. We lay on hands as a public declaration that God is commissioning this leader who we, as a community, confirm through reason is ready to interpret the mysteries of grace, lift the people's vision toward the hope of God's new creation, and encourage the people in the disciplines of the faith amid the struggles of daily life.⁴²

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⁴² Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, Book of Order* (Louisville, Ken.: Office of the General Assembly, 2013), G-2.0501.