AUGUSTINE'S MARTYRS AS IDEAL CHRISTIAN RHETORS

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Abstract

This article argues that we should read Augustine's preaching on the martyrs as endowing them with the qualities of the ideal Christian rhetor. In this way I hope to advance the common observation that martyr discourse is rhetorical. For Augustine, it is not just that martyr discourse is rhetorical; rather the martyrs themselves become rhetors, both in the performance of their *acta* and *passiones* as well as in their intended effect on Augustine's audience. I begin by showing how Augustine depicts the martyrs as rhetors. I then turn to the classical rhetorical tradition to trace concerns over a rhetor's relationship to justice and virtue, and how these ideas shape the ideal of the perfect rhetor, especially in Quintilian. Pivoting back to Augustine, I examine his own discussion of the ideal rhetor in *De doctrina christiana* before returning to my original martyrial examples to show that they are not depicted simply as rhetors but as ideal Christian rhetors, promoting divine wisdom and living exemplary lives.

Keywords

Martyrdom, martyrs, rhetoric, orator, Quintilian, Cicero, *De doctrina christiana*, *Sermones ad populum*

Rhetoric represents a particular mode of knowing and a way of ordering knowledge. Classical rhetorical handbooks provided techniques for discovering, constructing, and ultimately conveying knowledge. The emphasis on oratorical performance highlights the way in which that knowledge is presented with particular attention to arrangement, ordering, audience, etc. To know rhetorically means much more than having a grasp of the subject of one's speech; it means knowing how to communicate the right things to the right people effectively.

The one who is able to do this may be deemed the ideal rhetor, much like the ideal knower in a philosophical mode may be termed a sage. Of course, as we will see below, there is as much disagreement on how to define the former as there is the latter. Yet there is, as I will demonstrate below, a strong strain of the Latin rhetorical tradition that sees the morality of the orator as essential to the ideal. Skill in the art

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of persuasion must include a knowledge of what is good and true coupled with a commitment to those ends.

In this article, I will argue that we should read Augustine's preaching on the martyrs[1] as endowing them—at least some of them—with the qualities of the ideal *Christian* rhetor. In this way I hope to advance the by now cliché observation that martyr discourse is rhetorical[2] by adding some flesh to the bones of that statement. For Augustine, it is not just that martyr discourse is rhetorical; rather the martyrs themselves become rhetors, both in the performance of their *acta* and *passiones* as well as in their intended effect on Augustine's audience.

I begin by showing how Augustine depicts the martyrs as rhetors. I then turn to the classical rhetorical tradition to trace concerns over a rhetor's relationship to justice and virtue, and how this shapes the ideal of the perfect rhetor, especially in Quintilian. Pivoting back to Augustine, I examine his own discussion of the ideal rhetor in *De doctrina Christiana* before returning to my original martyrial examples to show that they are not depicted simply as rhetors but as ideal Christian rhetors, promoting divine wisdom and living exemplary lives.

[1] On Augustine and martyrdom, see Adam Ployd, "*Non poena sed causa*: Augustine's Anti-Donatist Rhetoric of Martyrdom," *Augustinian Studies* 49 (2018): 25-44; Anthony Dupont, "Augustine's Homiletic Definition of Martyrdom: The Centrality of the Martyr's Grace in his Anti-Donatist and Anti-Pelagian *Sermones ad Populum*," in *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300-450 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity*, eds. Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2012), 155-78; Collin Garbarino, "Augustine, Donatists, and Martyrdom," in *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, eds. Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo, and Phil Booth (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 49-61; Anthony Dupont, "Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Interpretation of Two Martyr Sermons: *Sermones* 299 and 335b on the Unnaturalness of Human Death," in *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter*, ed. Johan Leemans (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 87-102; Anthony Dupont, "*Imitatio Christi, Imitatio Stephani*: Augustine's Thinking on Martyrdom Based on his *Sermones* on the Protomartyr Stephen," *Augustiniana* 56 (2006): 29-61; Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "The Cult of Martyrs in St. Augustine: Theology versus Popular Religion?" in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, eds. Mathijs Lamberigts and Peter Van Deun (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 351-61; Jan den Boeft, "*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*: Augustine on Martyrdom," in *Fructus centesimus: mélanges offerts à Gerard J. M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, eds. A. A. R. Bastiaensen, A. Hilhorst, and C. H. J. M. Kneepkens (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 115-24.

[2] See especially the work of Elizabeth Castelli and Candida Moss. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

1. The Martyr as Rhetor

The best depiction of a martyr as a rhetor in Augustine comes in sermon 300, preached in an uncertain year[3] on the topic of the Maccabean martyrs. After spending most of the sermon explaining that dying prior to Christ's birth does not prohibit one's identification as a Christian martyr, Augustine turns to the story of the mother and her seven sons from 2 Mac 7. The mother becomes a model of martyrial endurance. "Being made the mother of seven martyrs, she was a martyr seven-fold; watching, she was not separated from her sons, and dying she added to her sons."[4] But it is her words that distinguish her:

> Antiochus, the persecutor, considered this woman a mother like other mothers. "Persuade," he said, "your son, lest he perish." And she said, "Surely I will persuade my son to live, by exhorting him to die; you want to persuade him to die by sparing himself." But what an address! How pious! How maternal! How evenly balanced between spiritual and carnal things! "Son, take pity on me. Son," she said, "take pity on me, who bore you for nine months in my womb; I gave you milk for three years and led you to this age; take pity on me" (2 Mac 7:27).[5]

Here Augustine combines his own prosopopoetic version of the mother's speech with text from 2 Mac itself to present her as an effective rhetor persuading her sons to save their lives by losing them in martyrdom. He even pauses to praise the quality of her well-balanced and appropriately intimate address.

[3] For the dating of this and other sermons, see the charts in Éric Rebillard, "*Sermones*," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 774-89; and *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. J. E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1979), 3/1: 138-63. These in turn depend on Hermann Josef Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller. Verzeichnis und Sigel. 4. Aktualisierte Auflage*, Vetus Latina 1/1 (Freiburg, 1995); and Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, O.S.B., *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin*, Instrumenta Patristica 12 (Steenbrugge, 1976).

[4] *s.* 300.6 (PL 38: 1379): "Facta mater septem martyrum, septies martyr: a filiis non separata spectando, et filiis addita moriendo."

[5] *s.* 300.7 (PL 38: 1380): "Hanc Antiochus persecutor uelut matrem de caeteris matribus computauit. **Persuade**, inquit, filio tuo, ne pereat. Et illa: Plane filio meo uitam **persuadebo**, ad mortem **cohortando**: tu mortem uis **persuadere**, parcendo. Qualis autem **allocutio**, quam pia, quam materna, quam inter spirituales et carnales in ambiguo suspensa! Fili, miserere mei. Fili, inquit, miserere mei, quae te nouem mensibus in utero portaui, cui lac triennio dedi, atque ad hanc aetatem perduxi: miserere mei."

But Augustine is not content just to show how well-spoken a martyr can be. He also wants to make a larger point about the difference between the rhetorical performance of the martyrs and the uncultured speech of their persecutors. For example, in a sermon on the Scillitan martyrs from 413, Augustine paints the scene in ekphrastic detail, focusing on the changing psychological states of the imperial official: "Now set before your eyes the contest of the martyrs. The opponent comes and he compels them to deny Christ. But let us lead him in flattering, not yet raging. He promises riches and honors."[6] At first the official himself wants to be an orator, a persuader who can woo the Christians away from Christ. But again deploying prosopopoeia, Augustine provides a powerful rhetorical response for the faithful man:

> Shall I deny Christ for the sake of riches? Shall I deny riches for the sake of riches? Shall I deny the treasure trove for the sake of gold? Truly, he it is "who became poor for our sakes, though he was rich, so that we might be enriched by his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9). Truly, he's the one about whom the apostle says, "in whom are all the treasure troves of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col 2:30).[7]

In light of this rhetorical performance, the imperial official is reduced to savagery. The condition of his mind has now changed, as if an entirely new character has entered the contest: "The promiser has been derided; another approaches, that is the persecutor. Flattering, he was derided; he begins raging. The snake that was derided has turned into a lion."[8] The persecutor is exposed as animalistic in his rage. Unable to compete in the realm of argument or persuasion against such an opponent, the persecutor manifests his own defeat, his own inhumanity, in succumbing to his passions and losing the ability for rational, persuasive speech. In fact, to drive the point home, the martyr responds to the savage threats of the persecutor with another well-balanced speech on the true good.

[6] *s.* 299D.4 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1: 77): "Constituite iam uobis ante oculos agonem martyrum. Venit inimicus, cogit Christum negare. Sed adhuc blandientem inducamus, nondum saeuientem. Promittit diuitias et honores."

[7] *s.* 299D.4 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1: 77): "Ego propter diuitias negabo Christum? Ego propter diuitias negabo diuitias? Ego propter aurum negabo thesaurum? Nempe ille est: *Qui propter nos pauper factus est, cum diues esset, ut eius paupertate nos ditaremur*. Nempe ille est, de quo item ait apostolus: *In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*."

[8] *s.* 299D.4 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1: 78): "Contemptus est promissor, accedit alius, id est persecutor: contemptus est blandiens, esse incipit saeuiens: contemptus est coluber, in leonem conuersus est."

It should be noted, of course, that these rhetorical performances of the martyrs do not only come by way of speeches. Perhaps the most effective example of a martyr retaining his ability to speak effectively in contrast to a raving persecutor comes in the story Augustine repeats from the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence. Lawrence, having been roasted on a gridiron by a persecutor "burning with rage," was himself "even more so [that is, burning] with love in his soul." This condition, presumably, is what allowed Lawrence to exclaim, "It's done cooking. The only thing left is to turn me over and eat!"[9]

Further, one celebrated North African martyr receives special treatment as a rhetor: Cyprian of Carthage. As a bishop trained in the art of rhetoric, Cyprian, like Augustine, would have deployed his training in the service of his preaching. Augustine, in discussing Cyprian's own martyrdom, highlights his rhetorical role in inspiring other martyrs before joining them: "Many martyrs preceded Cyprian, having been inflamed by his exhortations to conquer the devil."[10] By connecting Cyprian's own martyrdom to the rhetorical inspiration of his predecessors, Augustine brings the rhetoric of martyrdom full-circle: the martyr serves as a rhetor in order to inspire other martyrs. I now turn to this theme of rhetorical audience and goals.

So far we have seen the martyrs operate as rhetors within their own stories. But these accounts are written and presented for the audience external to the story, that is, in these cases, Augustine's contemporary congregations. This is even more the case when we are considering the prosopopoetic speeches Augustine places in their mouths. Or, rather, these instances represent the constructed nature of the whole enterprise. Augustine is presenting the martyrs as rhetors partly because it allows him to contrast their virtue with that of their persecutors. But he is also depicting them as rhetors because he wants them to function as such for his present audience.

Consider the mother and her seven sons. "Let a desire to imitate them burn in our hearts," Augustine tell his audience, "Let men learn to die for the truth. Let women learn from the great patience, the ineffable virtue of that mother."[11] Similarly, in the sermon on the Scillitan martyrs, where the faithful martyr chastised the persecutor

[9] *s.* 303.1 (PL 38: 1394): "[…] ardebat pene furore, sed plus anima charitate. […] *Iam*, inquit, *coctum est; quod superest, uersate me, et manducate*."

[10] *s.* 309.6 (PL 38: 1412): "Praecesserant Cyprianum multi martyres, quos flagrantissimis exhortationibus suis ad uincendum diabolum accenderat […]."

[11] *s.* 300.6 (PL 38: 1379): "Prorsus imitationis affectus ferueat in cordibus nostris. Discant uiri mori pro ueritate. Discant feminae, de matris illius tanta patientia, ineffabili uirtute; quae nouerat seruare filios suos."

for supposing that worldly things could appeal to one who has Christ, Augustine urges his hearers to "let Christ […] not be denied for the sake of necessities," before chastising those in attendance who would deny Christ for their own well-being even without the context of persecution.[12] Even Lawrence's *bon mot* elicits an invitation of imitation: "Let us follow his footsteps in faith, and let us follow in contempt of the world."[13] And Augustine encourages his audience to share in the very speech of Cyprian: "What should erupt from our hearts and our mouths, but the final words of that venerable martyr? […] 'Thanks be to God!'"[14] The martyrs, therefore, function as rhetors not only within their own stories but also, and more importantly, external to their stories as they are deployed to persuade those who venerate their memory.

In crafting his martyrs as rhetors, Augustine is drawing on a long tradition of rhetorical theory about what makes for the ideal rhetor. I turn now to that tradition, from Plato to Quintilian, before returning to show how Augustine's martyrs fulfil a particular moral ideal of rhetorical excellence.

2. *Vir bonus dicendi peritus*

Cicero has much to say on what makes for a good orator. In the *Brutus*, the *Orator*, *On Oratory*, and *On the Best Kind of Orator*, he takes up the question again and again. Consistently, he describes the superior orator, whether historical or ideal, as one who can deploy various styles appropriately to fit diverse audiences and purposes. Although moral concerns are not wholly absent, they are, nevertheless, not central to his consideration. Yet Cicero's approach lies a bit outside the norm, or, at least, it represents but one trend in classical rhetorical theory. In this section I trace a counter-trend that extends from Plato to Quintilian, one that intertwines the questions of just what rhetoric is and how it relates to the moral character of the orator. It is to this latter rhetorical tradition that Augustine's martyr-rhetors belong.

[12] *s.* 299D.6 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1: 79): "Ergo, fratres mei, non negetur Christus propter superflua, non negetur propter necessaria […]."

[13] *s.* 303.2 (PL 38: 1394): "Sequamur uestigia eius fide, sequamur et contemptu mundi."

[14] *s.* 309.6 (PL 38: 1412): "[…] in quid erumpat cor nostrum et os nostrum, nisi in ipsam uenerabilis Martyris ultimam uocem? […] Deo gratias."

Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* represent the appropriate starting point for considering Greco-Roman understandings of rhetoric and the virtues of the ideal rhetor. In the *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates appears rather negative toward rhetoric precisely because it does not seem to be a true ἐπιστήμη or τέχνη but merely a knack of some sort. In fact, Socrates gets Gorgias to admit, an orator would be better served by ignorance than wisdom in his efforts to convince.[15] Socrates is most concerned, however, that the rhetor would need to be one who possesses knowledge of what is just and unjust, shameful and admirable, good and bad, and thus that the orator must actually *be* a just, admirable, and good person (459c-460b).[16] This is the point at which Gorgias bows out of the argument, unable to confront the moral challenge posed by Socrates about the necessarily just character of a true orator.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is a bit more sanguine on the subject of rhetoric. Unlike in the *Gorgias*, he is here willing to treat rhetoric as a τέχνη for "directing the soul by means of speech" (261a).[17] To do so effectively, the orator must know the nature of the soul and indeed of the truth itself. Therefore, as in the *Gorgias*, Plato prioritizes philosophy over rhetoric, making the true orator first and foremost a philosopher. From the beginning, therefore, questions about the nature of rhetoric turn quickly to questions about the moral character and philosophical preparation of the orator.

Within the Latin tradition, this approach to rhetoric can be summed up in the phrase *uir bonus dicendi peritus*.[18] Originally a maxim of Cato the Elder, the saying is preserved in a number of authors. Seneca the Elder quotes it in the first book of his *Controuersiae*. Apuleius quotes it in his *Apology*. Ambrose of Milan and Jerome both quote the maxim, the former in his *De Abraham*, the latter in letter 69 to Oceanus in 397. These uses all suggest that *uir bonus dicendi peritus* had become an agreed upon shorthand definition for what makes an orator. The adjective *bonus* may admit of some ambiguity, but it

[15] For the difference between Plato's character of Gorgias and the actual rhetoric of the historical figure, see Bruce McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 17-54.

[16] For an analysis of this section of the *Gorgias*, see Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Pato's* Gorgias *and* Phaedrus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5-30; Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 87-92.

[17] See Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 169-74; and David A. White, *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato's* Phaedrus (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 175-202.

[18] On the history of this phrase, see William M. Calder, III, "VIR BONUS, DISCENDI PERITUS," *The American Journal of Philology* 108 (1987): 168-71.

is unambiguously attached to *uir*, identifying goodness, however we are to define it, as a necessary quality not just of an orator's speech but of the orator himself.

The most significant use of this formula comes in the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian.[19] Turning to him, then, will allow us to unpack at least one possible way in which an orator can be considered *bonus*. The phrase arises in Quintilian's final book, where he considers the necessary character of the ideal orator.[20] Lamenting that Cicero is concerned with style but not with moral character,[21] Quintilian declares for himself, "Let the orator whom we are establishing be, as Cato defines him, 'a good man skilled in speaking'; indeed, as Cato put first and what is by nature more important and greater, by all means let him be 'a good man.'"[22] Quintilian is precise about the implications of this claim: "I am not only saying that he who would be an orator ought to be a good man, but that only a good man will be an orator."[23] He offers a series of proofs for his claim, but holds to his strong assertion against every opposition he brings before himself. Ultimately, even if a wicked man might be considered eloquent, he is no orator.[24] A good moral character then is a *sine qua non* of being an orator for Quintilian. But this relationship goes even deeper.

[19] For a more nuanced treatment of Quintilian's ideal, see George Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 123-35.

[20] On the *uir bonus* in Quintilian, see Arthur E. Walzer, "Quintilian's 'Vir Bonus' and the Stoic Wise Man," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33 (2003): 25-41; Alan Brinton, "Quintilian, Plato, and the 'Vir Bonus,'" *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16 (1983): 167-84; Prentice A. Meador, Jr., "Quintilian's 'Vir Bonus,'" *Western Speech* 34 (1970): 162-69; Michael Winterbottom, "Quintilian and the *Vir Bonus*," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964): 90-97.

[21] Consider Quintilian's regret that even Cicero does not go far enough in describing the perfect orator, emphasizing style but ignoring morality: "Vnum modo in illa inmensa uastitate cernere uidemur M. Tullium, qui tamen ipse, quamuis tanta atque ita instructa naue hoc mare ingressus, contrahit uela inhibetque remos et de ipso demum genere dicendi quo sit usurus perfectus orator satis habet dicere. At nostra temeritas etiam mores ei conabitur dare et adsignabit officia" (Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.prooem.4 [LCL 494: 196]).

[22] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.1.1 (LCL 494: 196): "Sit ergo nobis orator quem constituimus is qui a M. Catone finitur uir bonus dicendi peritus, uerum, id quod et ille posuit prius et ipsa natura potius ac maius est, utique uir bonus […]."

[23] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.1.3 (LCL 494: 198): "Neque enim tantum id dico, eum qui sit orator uirum bonum esse oportere, sed ne futurum quidem oratorem nisi uirum bonum."

[24] Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.1.23 (LCL 494: 208): "Concedamus sane, quod minime natura patitur, repertum esse aliquem malum uirum summe disertum, nihilo tamen minus oratorem eum negabo."

As in Plato, Quintilian's discussion of an orator's morality is intimately connected to the question of how rhetoric itself is to be classified. In seeking to answer what rhetoric is, Quintilian opines that "The first and most significant difference of opinion is that some think that bad men also are able to be called orators, while others, with whose opinion I agree, wish this name and the art of which we are speaking to be assigned only to the good."[25] Those who disagree with Quintilian suggest that rhetoric may be labeled a power (*uim*), a science (*scientiam*), an art (*artem*), or even an evil art (κακοτεχνίαν), but they all agree that rhetoric is primarily about persuasion, "for this can be done also by one who is not a good man."[26] Under this heading of theorists describing rhetoric as merely the power (here he uses the term δύναμιν) of persuasion (some specifying "by speaking," some not) without clear regard for the moral character of the orator, he includes Isocrates, Gorgias as represented by Plato, and Cicero.

But for Quintilian himself, "the first [requirement of the perfect orator] is that he should be a good man."[27] This qualification guides his embrace of possible definitions for rhetoric. Ultimately, though, he puts forward a definition originally attributed to Xenocrates: "rhetoric is the science of speaking well." Such a definition, he tells us, "covers all the virtues of speech at once as well as the character of the orator, because only a good man is able to speak well."[28] Under this definition, therefore, he folds that of Chrysippus and Cleanthes, that rhetoric is "the science of speaking rightly" (*recte*), and that of Areus' "to speak according to the virtue of oration." Quintilian approves of calling rhetoric a *scientia* so long as *scientia* is associated with *uirtus*, and *ars* or *techne* also suffice as ways to distinguish rhetoric from a mere knack or talent. All of these classifications, however, must be connected to the moral quality of the orator. Without the latter, the former can be neither complete nor effective.

[25] Quintilian, *Inst*. 2.15.1 (LCL 124: 350): "Prima atque praecipua opinionum circa hoc differentia, quod alii malos quoque uiros posse oratores dici putant, alii, quorum nos sententiae accedimus, nomen hoc artemque de qua loquimur bonis demum tribui uolunt."

[26] Quintilian, *Inst*. 2.15.3 (LCL 124: 350): "[…] id enim fieri potest ab eo quoque qui uir bonus non sit."

[27] Quintilian, *Inst*. 2.15.33 (LCL 124: 366): "[…] nos autem ingressi formare perfectum oratorem, quem in primis esse uirum bonum uolumus […]."

[28] Quintilian, *Inst*. 2.15.34 (LCL 124: 366): "Huic eius substantiae maxime conuenient finitio **rhetoricen esse bene dicendi scientiam.** Nam et orationis omnes uirtutes semel complectitur et protinus etiam mores oratoris, cum bene dicere non possit nisi bonus."

While not unanimous, the Latin rhetorical tradition, as attested to and represented by Quintilian, contains a strong thread emphasizing the necessary moral character of the ideal orator. Moreover, this concern is connected to debates over the nature and classification of rhetoric such that Quintilian can define rhetoric as the *scientia* of speaking well, where *bene* is understood to include questions of virtue in both the speech and the speaker. I turn now to show how Augustine, in his own theory of rhetoric, appropriates and reinterprets this rhetorical tradition.

3. A Christian Rhetoric

Augustine's struggle with classical rhetoric is well known. It represents a key plot point in the autobiographical portions of his *Confessions* as he wrestles with his rhetorical profession and its moral implications. Consider how he describes an early exercise in his own rhetorical training:

> Permit me, my God, to say something also about my intelligence, your gift, and in what follies it was wasted by me. A task was given to me, which quite disturbed my soul with the reward of praise and fear of shame and blows, that I should recite the speech of Juno, angry and grieving that she "could not divert the Trojan king from Italy," which I heard that Juno never said. But we were compelled to follow the wandering footsteps of the poetic fictions and to speak in prose what the poet said in verse. And that speech was said to be most laudable in which, for the sake of the dignity of made-up characters, feelings most resembling anger and grief stood out, with the ideas appropriately dressed in words.[29]

According to Augustine, rhetoric as he was taught it was inherently concerned with fictions and follies. It took human skill in speaking, a true gift from God, and applied it to the raising of mythic passions rather than the promotion of true wisdom. And such activities are

[29] Augustine, *conf.* 1.17.27 (O'Donnell, 13): "Sine me, deus meus, dicere aliquid et de ingenio meo, munere tuo, in quibus a me deliramentis atterebatur. Proponebatur enim mihi negotium, animae meae satis inquietum praemio laudis et dedecoris uel plagarum metu, ut dicerem uerba Iunonis irascentis et dolentis quod non posset Italia Teucrorum auertere regem, quae numquam Iunonem dixisse audieram. Sed figmentorum poeticorum uestigia errantes sequi cogebamur et tale aliquid dicere solutis uerbis quale poeta dixisset uersibus. Et ille dicebat laudabilius in quo pro dignitate adumbratae personae irae ac doloris similior affectus eminebat, uerbis sententias congruenter uestientibus."

motivated, at their best, by a proud desire for praise and, at worst, by fear of shame and corporal punishment. Rhetoric was, in his experience, concerned neither with cultivating the moral character of the orator nor with the good of the auditor.

The more his rhetorical education advanced, the more problematic it became: "My studies, which were called honorable, had the purpose of leading one to litigation in the courts, in which I might excel, he being more laudable who is more fraudulent. The blindness of humanity is so great that they glory in their blindness."[30] And as a teacher himself, he attempts to find a happy balance in the morality of his teaching. Preferring to have "virtuous" students, he "taught them the tricks [of rhetoric], not that they should bring them to bear against the life of an innocent, but that sometimes they might use them on behalf of the life of a guilty person."[31] As he grows in his longing for God, Augustine comes to see that "something ought not be seen as true because it is eloquently spoken, nor false because the signs of the lips make sound uncomposed. Again, something is not true because it is enunciated incorrectly, nor false because the speech is splendid."[32]

And yet, Augustine, the celebrated preacher, does not reject rhetoric as irreparably profane. The error lies not in the art but in its application, not in the speech but in the speaker. As early as the *De ordine*, he proposes a crucial role to rhetoric in leading souls toward the good, the just, and the true.[33] But of course it is his *De doctrina Christiana*, and especially book 4, that offers a full-throated presentation of a Christian Rhetoric.[34] Turning to that work, I want to

[30] Augustine, *conf.* 3.3.6 (O'Donnell, 25): "Habebant et illa studia quae honesta uocabantur, ductum suum intuentem fora litigiosa, ut excellerem in eis, hoc laudabilior, quo fraudulentior. Tanta est caecitas hominum de caecitate etiam gloriantium."

[31] Augustine, *conf.* 4.2.2 (O'Donnell, 33): "[…] et eos sine dolo docebam dolos, non quibus contra caput innocentis agerent sed aliquando pro capite nocentis."

[32] Augustine, *conf.* 5.6.10 (O'Donnell, 50): "[…] iam ergo abs te didiceram **nec eo debere uideri aliquid uerum dici, quia eloquenter dicitur, nec eo falsum, quia incomposite sonant signa labiorum; rursus nec ideo uerum, quia impolite enuntiatur, nec ideo falsum, quia splendidus sermo est**, sed perinde esse sapientiam et stultitiam sicut sunt cibi utiles et inutiles, uerbis autem ornatis et inornatis sicut uasis urbanis et rusticanis utrosque cibos posse ministrari."

[33] Augustine, *ord.* 2.13.38. See Nello Cipriani, O.S.A., "Rhetoric," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 724-26.

[34] On the idea of a Christian rhetoric, see the essays collected in Richard Leo Enos, Roger Thompson, Amy K. Hermanson, Drew M. Loewe, Kristi Schwertfeger Serrano, Lisa Michelle Thomas, Sarah L. Yoder, David Elder, and John W. Burkett (eds.), *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo:* De Doctrina Christiana *and the Search*

highlight two related themes in Augustine's discussion of Christian rhetoric: the relationship between wisdom and eloquence, and the character of the preacher.

Augustine argues that the role of the preacher or of the Christian rhetor is to "teach what is good and unteach what is bad."[35] There is thus an inherent moral component to his understanding of Christian rhetoric as the preacher is supposed to move the soul of the hearer toward what is good and true as defined by the Catholic faith. But doing so requires not just eloquence but eloquence joined with wisdom. In fact, eloquence on it its own can be dangerous because an audience is wont to "believe that somebody they hear speaking eloquently is also speaking the truth."[36] Thus, for Augustine, eloquence properly deployed must be joined to wisdom, a knowledge of what is true and good.[37] We see here echoes of Plato's concerns that the rhetor responsible for promoting justice must possess knowledge of what is just.

Plato's correlative also holds for Augustine. That is to say, just as in the *Gorgias* Plato held that the one who would promote justice must know justice and therefore also be just, so Augustine holds that one who would promote wisdom through Christian rhetoric must live according to that wisdom in their own moral character. At the beginning of *De doctrina Christiana* 4, Augustine suggests that the basic prerequisite for someone wanting to study the rules of rhetoric is that they first be "a good man (*bono uiro*)."[38] After winding his way through the rhetorical skill of the biblical authors and the proper use of the low, middle, and high styles to teach, delight, and move, he returns to this moral theme at the end of work: "Of more weight than any amount of grandeur of style to those of us who want to be listened

for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), especially James J. Murphy, "Saint Augustine and the Debate about a Christian Rhetoric," 187-204; and Ernest J. Fortin, "Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric," 219-34.

[35] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.4.6 (CCL 32: 119): "Debet igitur diuinarum scripturarum tractator et doctor, defensor rectae fidei ac debellator erroris, et **bona docere et mala dedocere** atque in hoc opere sermonis conciliare auersos, remissos erigere, nescientibus, quod agitur, quid exspectare debeant intimare."

[36] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.5.7 (CCL 32: 120): "Qui uero affluit insipienti eloquentia, tanto magis cauendus est, quanto magis ab eo in his, quae audire inutile est, delectatur auditor et eum, **quoniam diserte dicere audit, etiam uere dicere existimat**."

[37] On the joining of Christian wisdom and classical eloquence, see Amy K. Hermanson, "Religion's Rhetoric: Saint Augustine's Union of Christian Wisdom and Sophistic Eloquence," in Enos et al. (eds.), *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine*, 311-14.

[38] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.1.2 (CCL 32: 117).

to obediently is the life of the speaker."[39] For Augustine, the moral speaker will be a better testament to the truth of which he speaks, making his eloquence truly fruitful. In good Augustinian fashion, the ideal speaker has a properly directed love that will in turn properly direct the hearts of her audience, "since not even the love which is the end of the commandment and the fulfillment of the law can be ordered rightly if the things which are loved are not true but false."[40] Even the ineloquent, those incapable of speaking well even in the simplest of styles can still be rhetors inasmuch as they "are able to live in such a way that they not only gain a reward for themselves but also provide an example to others, and their form of life becomes like an abundance of eloquence."[41]

Thus, we can derive a picture of Augustine's ideal orator. They are wise through familiarity with scripture, and therefore can promote what is good and true, and they will promote it not only through their eloquence, though that helps, but through the conformity of their life to that truth. In short, Augustine's ideal Christian rhetor is a *uir bonus dicendi peritus*, where the term *bonus* has been given a clear Christian moral gloss and *dicendi* is extended to include the way one's life speaks. In this way Augustine baptizes the Latin rhetorical tradition we observed above and saw especially embodied by Quintilian. To be clear, I am not making an argument for Augustine's necessary debt to Quintilian here. Rather, I am arguing that Augustine's approach to the ideal rhetor fits within the tradition that Quintilian epitomizes, but with a particular Christian idiom. It is time now to return to Augustine's martyrs, to show how they embody this ideal of the wise Christian rhetor.

4. The Martyr as Ideal Christian Rhetor

Above I argued that Augustine depicts his martyrs as rhetors, speaking eloquently in the face of raving persecutors and aiming their persuasive efforts not so much at the characters within their own narrative as at the audience hearing the narrative, that is, Augustine's

[39] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.27.59 (CCL 32: 163): "Habet autem ut oboedienter audiamus, quantacumque granditate dictionis maius pondus uita dicentis."

[40] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.28.61 (CCL 32: 165): "quoniam nec ipsa, quae *praecepti* finis et *plenitudo* legis est *caritas*, ullo modo esse recta potest, si ea, quae diliguntur, non uera, sed falsa sunt."

[41] Augustine, *doc. Chr.* 4.29.61 (CCL 32: 165): "Si autem ne hoc quidem potest, ita conuersetur, ut non solum sibi praemium comparet, sed et praebeat aliis exemplum et sit eius quasi copia dicendi forma uiuendi."

congregation. I then traced a thread within the Latin rhetorical tradition, as represented by Quintilian, that sees a knowledge of justice and moral character as essential to the ideal rhetor. Finally, I showed how Augustine picks up this thread and adds a Christian gloss, making his ideal rhetor first and foremost a bearer of divine wisdom as manifest in his upright way of life. All that remains, is to demonstrate that Augustine depicts his martyrs not only as martyrs but as ideal martyrs within this Christianized rhetorical tradition. To do so, I return to the Maccabean mother, the Scillitan martyrs, Lawrence, and Cyprian to examine the content of their martyrial performance, which fits within Augustine's understanding of divine wisdom and Christian morality.

Beginning this time with Cyprian, we note that the martyrs all embody a certain congruity between their speech and their actions. Augustine claims that the martyr-bishop

> taught faithfully what he was going to do and did bravely what he had taught. Living justly he came to a precious death, and dying unjustly he came to a glorious life; and he gained the triumphant name of martyr, because he fought for truth to the point of blood.[42]

The quality of Cyprian's living and dying provide the legitimacy for his Christian rhetoric. Had he not been willing to suffer the fate of those he urged to martyrdom, or had he not died for the sake of truth and justice, Cyprian's rhetoric would have been empty.

Returning to Augustine's prosopopoetic speech as the Maccabean mother, we see her support her plea to her sons with the following vision of the true good: "Consent to God, do not desert your brothers. If it seems like you desert me, then you do not desert me. I will have you there, where I will not fear losing you anymore. There Christ will preserve you for me, there whence Antiochus will not take you."[43] The mother's vision of a heavenly reunion with her son has a distinctly Augustinian flair: to be truly blessed, one must possess the good eternally without fear of losing it. This includes the good of love by which we love one another. An earthly love leaves us susceptible to the loss of our beloved, and such misdirected fear can be manipulated to inspire apostasy. But a heavenly love, a love of the other within

[42] *s.* 310.3 (PL 38: 1413): "Docuit fideliter quod facturus erat, fecit fortiter quod docuerat. Ad pretiosam mortem iuste uiuendo, ad gloriosam uero uitam iniuste moriendo peruenit; atque adeptus est triumphale martyris nomen, quia perduxit usque ad sanguinem pro ueritate certamen."

[43] *s.* 300.7 (PL 38: 1380): "Consenti deo, noli deserere fratres tuos. Si me quasi deseris, tunc me non deseris. Ibi te habebo, ubi ne perdam ulterius non timebo. Ibi te mihi seruabit Christus, unde non tollet Antiochus."

God, assures us that we will never lose them as we are both held in God's eternality.

Similarly, returning to the sermon on the Scillitan martyrs, we see the faithful man continue his speech on true riches and those things that are truly to be desired. We have already seen him quote Col 2:30, praising the "hoard of wisdom and knowledge" hidden in Christ. But his speech continues, ostensibly addressing his persecutor, but really teaching Augustine's audience:

> You attend to what you promise because you are unable to see what you are trying to take [from me]. I, by faith, see what you wish to take from me; you, with the eyes of flesh, see what you wish to give. They are better things which the eye of the heart sees, than that which the eye of flesh sees. [quotes 2 Cor 4:18] […]. Therefore I despise your gifts […] because they are temporal, they are superfluous, they rot, they fly away, they're full of dangers, full of temptations.[44]

This is his speech when offered riches and honors. He promotes the pursuit of eternal, spiritual goods and the disregard of earthly, material goods, using a host of Pauline texts to support this transvaluation (including, in addition to those already cited, 2 Cor 8:9 and 1 Tim 6:7-8, 17-19). Thus, we find continuity between this martyr speech and that of the Maccabean mother. Both promote an awareness of the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual, encouraging their hearers to pursue the higher things of God while forsaking the lower things as "superfluities." This distinction lies at the heart of Augustine's understanding of Christian wisdom, so it should come as no surprise that it is a repeated theme within the speeches he puts into the mouths of his martyrs.

Finally, we see a similar rhetorical performance of Christian wisdom in the account of St. Lawrence. First, in his agreement to deliver carts filled with all the treasures of the church, only to bring the poor and declare them to be the riches of the church, Lawrence brings wisdom to bear against greed: "Avarice," Augustine says, "opened its jaws, but wisdom knew what it was doing."[45] This

[44] *s.* 299D.4 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1: 77-78): "Attendis quod promittis, quia non potes uidere quod tollere conaris. Ego fide uideo, quod mihi uis auferre; tu oculis carnis, quod uis dare; meliora sunt, quae cordis oculus intuetur, quam quae oculus carnis uidet. *Quae enim uidentur, temporalia sunt; quae autem non uidentur, aeterna*. Contemno ergo dona tua, inquit fidelis anima, quia temporalia sunt, superflua sunt, caduca sunt, uolatica sunt, plena sunt periculis, plena temptationibus. Nemo haec habet quando uult, perdit et quando non uult."

[45] *s.* 303.1 (PL 38: 1394): "Aperuit fauces auaritia: sed sciebat quid faceret sapientia."

account of St. Lawrence's pious cleverness extends the realm of rhetorical performance beyond the work of words and into that of the rhetor's behavior. This approach to persuasion is further manifest in Lawrence's playful words on the gridiron as he proclaims himself done on one side and ready to be flipped. It is a good line, indeed, but its power lies in its manifestation of equanimity in the face of bodily pain. As Augustine describes it, "he is said to have borne with such tranquility those torments, that in him it was fulfilled what we heard just now in the gospel: 'In patience you will possess your souls' (Luke 21:19)."[46] It is not just in his words but, primarily, in his actions that Augustine wants Lawrence to be seen as persuasive. This fits well with Augustine's claim in *De doctrina Christiana* that what is most important, even more important than eloquence or wisdom, is the teacher's behavior, by which she might have the greatest effect as an example.

Indeed, it is as moral exemplars that Augustine's martyrs have the most persuasive effect. But we should not limit their exemplarity to merely being *exempla* that the real rhetor can draw upon and use. The martyrs are not simply rhetorical tools. Rather, as we have seen Augustine construct them as rhetors themselves, specifically as Christian rhetors promoting divine wisdom through their virtuous speech, we should bear in mind the concern expressed by Augustine and others in the Latin rhetorical tradition that the character of the rhetor be considered essential to his work. And so, the martyrs are constructed as rhetors not only in their oral promotion of virtue and wisdom, but ideally in their living out of those virtues and wisdom. That is to say, in their speaking and also in their dying, Augustine's martyrs fulfill his own ideal of the Christian rhetor.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, I return to my opening theme of modes of knowing and the ordering of knowledge. To some degree, the rhetorical knowledge we have seen has been Augustine's, not the martyrs'. After all, they are his own rhetorical construction and whatever they "know" and however they know it depends on his own mastery and deployment of the rhetorical mode. But I believe we can see something more in

[46] *s.* 303.1 (PL 38: 1394): "Et cum ex uno latere arsisset, dicitur tanta tranquillitate illa tormenta tolerasse, ut impleretur in eo quod modo in Euangelio audiuimus, *in patientia uestra possidebitis animas uestras*."

Augustine's construction of the martyrs than his own skill. He is making a claim about what the martyrs were and are. They are the ultimate rhetors possessing the ultimate truth and performing it in the ultimate way. To put it in terms of the Latin rhetorical tradition, a martyr is *dicendi peritus* not because of the skill of his speech but because his speech reflects his character as a *uir bonus*, or a *femina bona*. To remain faithful to Christ through torture and unto death requires a commitment to what Augustine would see as true wisdom, namely, the preference of spiritual goods to material, of the Creator to the creature, of the soul to the body. In short, while I have been discussing Augustine's presentation of a rhetorical mode of knowing, Augustine himself has been describing a martyrial mode of knowing. While he depicts them as the ideal rhetor, they are really nothing more than the ideal Christian. No special training is needed to acquire the knowledge of these martyrs, the faith in the truth that gave them strength; nor are special qualifications needed to perform that knowledge persuasively. All one needs is faith and the most remedial understanding of Christian teaching. The mode of knowing that Augustine's martyrs-as-rhetors embody, therefore, is a quotidian Christian mode. The martyrs are ideal rhetors, but they are only that in order to manifest the nature of an ideal everyday Christian.

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