

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Anger, Prayer, and the Transformation of Desire: Augustine’s Catechumenate as an Emotion-Shaping Institution

Alex Fogleman

Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA

Email: [Alex\\_Fogleman@baylor.edu](mailto:Alex_Fogleman@baylor.edu)

Anger was a topic of significant reflection in antiquity, and it was taken up in new ways in early Christianity. As contemporary historians explore the myriad ways in which emotions were not only described but also presented, scripted, and made normative in historical sources, greater clarity is needed to understand the ways in which institutions were involved in shaping emotions. This essay argues that Augustine of Hippo’s catechetical instruction on the Lord’s Prayer constituted a critical institution for the transposition of classical discourses on anger and its healing into Christian education. Augustine understood the catechumenate itself as an institution for teaching patience and forbearance as antidotes to anger, and in these settings, he provided a variety of cognitive and spiritual exercises for diagnosing and treating anger. By articulating baptismal education as an emotion-shaping institution, we can better appreciate the ways in which Christian communities developed and expanded the inherited institutions of antiquity for ordering the emotions. In addition, such reflection allows us to evaluate the subtle interplays between emotions as felt subjective experiences and as reflective of social organizations that instilled and prescribed emotional norms.

**Keywords:** anger; Augustine; catechesis; emotions; prayer

“Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles.” So began what would become the archetypal epic of Western culture, Homer’s *Iliad*, and so began a generations-long reflection in Western civilization on the psychology and therapy of anger. Anger exercised the attention not only of poets and philosophers but also of rhetoricians, statesmen, and bishops. Among contemporary historians, the “emotional turn” has now come into full force.<sup>1</sup>

---

This article is dedicated to the memory of Donald M. Lewis, long-time church historian and professor at Regent College, who passed away in October 2021. A man of little anger and much prayer, Don was a dear friend and mentor to many. Earlier portions of this material were presented at the Augustine and Augustinianisms unit of the American Academy of Religion in 2019 and the Prayer in Antiquity unit of the Society for Biblical Literature in 2021. My thanks to Jonathan Teubner for his response during the former session and to the organizers of both panels for their arrangements. Thanks also go to Daniel Williams, David Wilhite, and the reviewers and editors of Church History for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this work.

<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, the Oxford University Press series, “Emotions in History,” which began in 2014. For recent overviews, see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press,

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Society of Church History. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Studies on the history of emotions enable historical reflection on lived experience to intersect with positive psychology, neuroscience, and sociology to nuance the ways we understand the socially constructed character of emotions and to challenge the notion that certain feelings are statically hardwired into human nature. Emotions have a history, and the more we appreciate the range of images, texts, assumptions, norms, and scripts that guide the shaping of emotions, the better suited we will be, on the one hand, to appreciate the lived experiences of our historical subjects and, on the other hand, to question the naturalness of contemporary states of affective experience.

In scholarship on the history of emotions, one area that has attracted significant attention is the characterization of emotions as socially constructed norms and prescriptions. Barbara Rosenwein, for example, distinguishes “emotional communities” from emotions understood as individual virtues and vices.<sup>2</sup> Peter and Carol Stearns, meanwhile, separate emotions themselves from what they call “emotionology,” which they define as the “the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression.”<sup>3</sup> As a final example, Monique Scheer, drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, develops a theory of “emotion practices” to understand the ways in which emotions emerge “from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity.”<sup>4</sup> Each of these projects attends to the historically conditioned social and embodied character of emotions and not only to descriptions of an interior state.

The viability of such theories, however, depends on a careful consideration of the nature of institutions. A religious community will attempt to regulate emotions differently than, say, a family unit or political group. Particular religious communities will project and reflect emotions differently than others. Even within individual religious communities, certain approaches to emotional conditioning will prevail depending on the specific audience being addressed. As Christoph Marksches has recently demonstrated, a careful study of institutions is vital for understanding the ways in which ideas, behaviors, and attitudes spread and solidified in the ancient Christian

---

2018); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020). For book-length treatments of the emotions in classical and late antiquity, see especially Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Simo Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment: Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Blake Leyerle, *The Narrative Shape of Emotion in the Preaching of John Chrysostom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>For these terms, see Rosenwein, *Anger*. See also Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813.

<sup>4</sup>Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193.

world.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I argue that Augustine of Hippo's catechumenate, especially his teaching of the Lord's Prayer to catechumens, was critical for institutionalizing a discourse on the emotion of anger. While anger was discussed in other early Christian writings, it was especially in Augustine's catechesis on the Lord's Prayer that we find a pronounced focus on anger and the corresponding correctives of patience and forbearance. He imagined the catechumenate itself as an institution for shaping a social therapy of anger, and he provided in these settings a series of cognitive and spiritual exercises for treating the irascible passions. In teaching catechumens to pray, Augustine focused on the diagnosis and healing of anger, and in so doing offers us a precise institutional setting in which to locate the emergence of certain forms of "emotional communities," "emotionologies," and "emotion practices" in late antiquity.

Along with the creed, Augustine taught the Lord's Prayer as the primary form of instruction for those preparing for Easter baptism (*Sermons* 56–59).<sup>6</sup> These sermons are usually dated to around 410 to 412, though there is little firm evidence to suggest a clear date besides the absence of anti-Pelagian rhetoric, and even that is suspect.<sup>7</sup> We do know, however, that the catechumenate was of central importance for Augustine. The African bishop was greatly concerned with the status of catechumens and their socialization into Christian membership as they progressed to baptism.<sup>8</sup> In light of this concern, it is especially worth noting Augustine's focus on anger and forgiveness in these sermons.<sup>9</sup> Articulating the Lord's Prayer as the "form of desires" (*forma desideriorum*), Augustine provided catechumens with an institutional framework and a set of spiritual exercises for transforming anger into patience and forbearance, attitudes that reflected a transvalued desire for God. As we will see, reflection on anger in antiquity was closely linked with desire—in particular, the desire for revenge, a theme introduced by Aristotle and commented on throughout later authors—and its attendant pains and pleasures. In Christian teachers, we find additional reflection on

<sup>5</sup>Christoph Marksches, *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology*, trans. Wayne Coppins (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 22–29. Marksches wants to avoid thinking of institutions only in legal or formal terms and instead to construct a broader understanding of the social patterns that shape normative thought and behavior. While Marksches does not discuss the catechumenate (or the emotions), the application of his conception of institutions for the study of the catechumenate has been fruitfully applied in Benjamin Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation: History and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, *Sermons*, 56–59; P.-P. Verbraken et al., ed., *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 41Aa* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), hereafter CCSL; Edmund Hill, trans., *Works of Saint Augustine for the 21st Century III/3* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1992), hereafter WSA. For background, see Jean-Paul Bouhot, "La tradition catéchétique et exégétique du Pater noster," *Recherches augustiniennes et patristiques* 33 (2003): 3–18; Roy Hammerling, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church: The Pearl of Great Price* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 69–73; William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 336–344; Martin Brons, *Augustinus Trinitätslehre praktisch: Katechese, Liturgie, Predigt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 183–200; Matthieu Pignot, *The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa (4th–6th Centuries): Augustine of Hippo, His Contemporaries and Early Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

<sup>7</sup>See the comments and references in Pignot, *Catechumenate in North Africa*, 215n160. For the dating of these sermons to 410–412, see Edmund Hill's notes on *Sermon* 56 in WSA III/3:106n1.

<sup>8</sup>On the importance of the catechumenate as a distinct category of identity membership in Augustine, see Pignot, *Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa*.

<sup>9</sup>In his treatment of Augustine's catechesis, William Harmless noticed that the forgiveness petition received the most copious treatment in these sermons. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 342.

the dynamics of desire and anger through the study of biblical sources, such as Matthew 5:22 and Ephesians 4:26–27, and the examples of Christ and the martyrs. These sources allowed Christian authors to draw together classical discourses on anger and desire with Christian discussions on prayer, patience (in particular, understood as the willingness to bear wrongdoing and suffering), and forgiveness.<sup>10</sup> Rather than allowing the desire for revenge to engender a deep-seated and debilitating anger, the catechumen was instructed to practice forgiveness and longsuffering in a way that reflected the reordered desire for God facilitated through prayer.

In what follows, it will first be necessary to understand anger in the key educational institutions of Greek and Roman culture, as well as in early Christianity. Then we will be able to situate Augustine's catechumenate as an institution for normalizing a discourse on patience and forgiveness, observing the way he interpreted the catechumenate more broadly as an exercise in patience and the way in which, in these settings, he guided catechumens in various exercises for the diagnosis and therapy of anger.

### I. The Diagnosis and Healing of Anger in Antiquity and Early Christianity

The educational systems of Graeco-Roman culture—often encompassed in the Greek term *paideia* or the Latin *artes liberales*—aimed not only to teach grammar and speaking but also to construct the social identities and mores of an elite ruling class.<sup>11</sup> Ancient *paideia* provided a shared set of moral codes that served as a form of initiation into the class of elites.<sup>12</sup> As Martin Bloomer puts it, *paideia* is a process of “persona building” in which instructors “produced a definite subjectivity in its elite participants”<sup>13</sup> through the exercises of grammar, reading, composition, and declamation. Through developing the skills of reading and speaking and through the assumption of fictive personas, students literally learned to talk and imagine themselves as another kind of person.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>My thanks to David Wilhite for the clarification that *patientia* in early Christian discourse was specifically tied to the issue of willingness to suffer wrongdoing rather than a more general attitude of forbearance.

<sup>11</sup>For key works, see George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World, 300 BC–AD 300* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Stanley F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (London: Routledge, 1977); Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); H. Gregory Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2000); Yun Lee Too, ed., *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); W. Martin Bloomer, *The School of Rome: Latin Studies and the Origins of Liberal Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup>As Robert Kaster puts it, teaching “presumed mores; to be a scholar presumed that one was the right sort of person, a gentleman. . . . [L]etters validated claims to status, both moral status and social, although the two were hardly separate in the eyes of the traditionally cultured man.” Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 27.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Bloomer, “Schooling in Persona: Imagination and Subordination in Roman Education,” *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 1 (1997): 57.

<sup>14</sup>Bloomer, *School of Rome*, 170–191; Bloomer, “Schooling in Persona,” 57–78.

The pedagogical “persona building” for treating anger was particularly important in these settings.<sup>15</sup> In a political system in which violence was enmeshed at nearly every level, notables turned to the seemingly sorcerous power of words to maintain social order. An injudicious loss of temper could mean the end of one’s career, even one’s life, while the ability to remain imperturbable amid turmoil and to show temperance appropriately demonstrated one’s true magnanimity. The mastery of speech was thus more than a matter of verbal decorum; it demonstrated self-control. As Peter Brown puts it, rhetorical mastery “carried with it a sense of quiet triumph over all that was slovenly, unformed, and rebellious in the human voice and so, by implication, in the human person.”<sup>16</sup> The oratorical ideals of harmony and control translated into a moral agenda that prized the control of anger and the cultivation of temperance and clemency. Teachers gave careful attention to the modulation of breathing and vocal pitch, of bodily posture and facial gestures, which developed and displayed an interior tranquility. “With measured words,” declared Gregory of Nazianzus in one of his orations, “I learn to bridle rage.”<sup>17</sup> The rhetorician who could command an audience through mastery of speech was one who also had a firm command over anger.

Additionally, the topic of anger received focused attention among ancient and late-antique philosophical schools. Following the work of Pierre Hadot, historians have become much more attuned to the therapeutic aims of ancient philosophy, not least the treatment of anger and its corollaries.<sup>18</sup> Hadot’s conception of philosophy as a “way of life” prioritized the disciplining of the soul over a more purely abstract theorizing, which he organized into four categories of spiritual exercises: learning to live, learning to dialogue, learning to die, and learning to read.<sup>19</sup> Different schools presented different descriptions and treatments of anger, each proposing a resolution to the pathos that prohibited one from making progress in the philosophical life. While the pre-Socratics touched on anger only sporadically, beginning with Plato and especially with Aristotle, we find more developed reflection on the psychological and physiological contours of anger and its treatments. In the middle works of Plato, such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*, there is new reflection on the importance of *thumos*, the third of Plato’s tripartite psychology along with reason and desire. *Thumos* is difficult to translate, for it comprises a range of “spirited” emotions, such as anger, courage, a sense of justice, and a

<sup>15</sup>Most notably, Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, chap. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 48.

<sup>17</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 6.6, quoted in Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 50.

<sup>18</sup>Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995). Among scholars of Augustine who have utilized this approach, see Lewis Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII–XV,” *Augustinian Studies* 29, no. 1 (1998): 111–139; Thomas F. Martin, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as Pedagogy: Exercises in Transformation,” in *Augustine and Liberal Education*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 25–51; Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Brian Stock, *Augustine’s Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup>While Hadot has been criticized for homogenizing all of philosophy within a therapeutic or existential mode, by and large his approach has opened fruitful ways of understanding the pedagogical orientation of ancient philosophical and Christian writing. For discussion and critiques of Hadot, see Maria Antonaccio, “Contemporary Forms of *Askesis* and the Return of Spiritual Exercises,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 18 (1998): 69–92; John Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

longing for honor.<sup>20</sup> Unlike a strictly negative emotion like *orgē*, *thumos* could be harnessed as a critical force in the acquisition of virtue and the pursuit of justice.<sup>21</sup>

With Aristotle, we see a new attention to anger as a subject of psychic and physiological health, particularly connected with the question of desire. Aristotle considers the topic of anger in his treatise on rhetoric, where he makes a crucial link between anger and desire—a connection that will resurface in subsequent authors. Anger, Aristotle writes, is “a desire accompanied by pain for [an apparent] revenge due to an apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends by persons who ought not to slight him.”<sup>22</sup> Aristotle contended that anger was accompanied not only by pain but also by pleasure—the desire to avenge the wrongdoing.<sup>23</sup> In considering how to treat anger, Aristotle focused on the process of evaluating the wrongdoing and whether the desired retribution was fitting. A person who is only slighted by accident, for instance, should take a different approach than someone wronged by deliberate intention. In addition, Aristotle categorized anger as an activity instead of a social relation—distinguishable, for example, from enmity or hatred. Whereas enmity is defined in relational terms, as something like the inverse of friendship, anger entailed the desire to cause harm to another. It is not that the other person should be eliminated but that he or she should feel in return the pain that had been inflicted.<sup>24</sup> In considering anger in these terms, Aristotle set the agenda for much subsequent reflection.<sup>25</sup>

Among later Roman and Hellenistic philosophers, several works were devoted to the topic of anger specifically, with questions about anger and the desire for revenge close at hand. Plutarch, Seneca, and Philodemus, among others, devoted specific treatises to the topic of anger.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the Peripatetic tradition continued to hold a more positive place for anger, as a spur to justice, the Stoics, by contrast, considered anger in strictly negative terms, as a temporary madness that was contrary to nature.<sup>27</sup> Treatments for preventing as well as restraining anger included especially cognitive exercises like

<sup>20</sup>Plato, *Republic* 4.440b–e; *Phaedrus* 253d–254e. On *thumos* in Plato, especially the *Republic*, see Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness, and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup>William Harris argues that by the time we get to later works like the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, however, *thumos* appears harder to constrain and something that must be distanced from desire and more closely aligned with reason. Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 92.

<sup>22</sup>Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.2 [1378a31–31]; trans. J. H. Freese, rev. Gisela Striker, Loeb Classical Library 193 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 170–171 (translation slightly altered), hereafter LCL.

<sup>23</sup>Konstans, *Emotions*, 42.

<sup>24</sup>Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.4 [1382a8].

<sup>25</sup>The endurance of Aristotle’s definition of *orgē* in subsequent authors is noted by Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 61.

<sup>26</sup>For a list of non-Christian and Christian works specifically devoted to the emotions or anger, see the lists in Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 127.

<sup>27</sup>Seneca, *On Anger* 1.1; John W. Basore, ed. and trans., LCL 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 106–107: “For the other emotions have in them some element of peace and calm, while this one is wholly violent and has its being in an onrush of resentment, raging with a most inhuman lust for weapons, blood, and punishment, giving no thought to itself if only it can hurt another, hurling itself upon the very point of the dagger, and eager for revenge though it may drag down the avenger along with it. Certain wise men, therefore, have claimed that anger is temporary madness (*breuem insaniam*).” Seneca later does make an exception for a kind of “pretended anger” that serves pedagogical ends: “Wrath is therefore never admissible; sometimes we must feign it if we have to arouse the sluggish minds of our hearers, just as we apply goads and brands to arouse horses that are slow in starting upon their course.” Seneca, *On Anger* 2.14.1; LCL 214:196–197.

*praemediatio malorum* or attention to “indifferent things.” An Epicurean like Philodemus presented his view as a middle path between the Peripatetics and Stoics. In the first half of his treatise *On Anger*, Philodemus offers a diatribe of people undone by fits of anger, like a doctor laying plain before his patient the nature of their illness.<sup>28</sup> In the second half, he takes an analytic approach, categorizing anger as either natural anger or empty anger. The latter, exemplified in Achilles’s rage as depicted in the *Iliad*, was wholly negative and dependent upon an empty desire for revenge. Natural anger, however, could be positive and indeed a necessary emotion in the philosophical quest.<sup>29</sup> Natural anger, for Philodemus, was not simply an unreflective response to provocation accompanied by the desire for revenge. Rather, natural anger itself was possible only after careful thought and training in philosophy. Natural anger was thus an emotion most properly suited to the philosophical context of education.<sup>30</sup>

Given the substantial treatment of anger in rhetorical and philosophical settings, it is not surprising to find early Christians commenting on anger as well. Many Christian leaders in late antiquity received a classical education—with varying degrees of appropriation<sup>31</sup>—and sought to utilize this form of cultural capital in service to Christian teaching.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Christian teachers reflected on biblical texts and hagiological exempla to reflect on anger and its healing. They looked to Christ’s words to his disciples to eschew anger (Matthew 5:22) and to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38–40) and to the Apostle Paul’s counsel to “be angry but sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). Christian writers also saw in the deaths of Christ and the martyrs exemplifications of the refusal of anger and the promotion of patience and forgiveness. Several homilies or treatises survive from Christian leaders, such as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and John Cassian, which treat anger as a moral issue requiring thoughtful consideration.<sup>33</sup> More germane to the present topic, we also find reflection on anger and its relation to prayer in the North African tradition of commentary on the Lord’s Prayer. In his treatise on prayer, Tertullian explains that one must be free from anger and other pathologies of the soul so that one’s prayer can

<sup>28</sup>Philodemus, *On Anger* 3–4.

<sup>29</sup>For helpful treatments of Philodemus’s work, see Julia Annas, “Epicurean Emotions,” *Greek and Byzantine Studies* 30, no. 1 (1989): 145–164; Elizabeth Asmis, “The Necessity of Anger in Philodemus’ *On Anger*,” in *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*, ed. Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 152–182; David Armstrong and Michael McOsker, eds., *Philodemus: On Anger* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020). Asmis further categorizes natural anger into necessary and unnecessary anger.

<sup>30</sup>Annas, “Epicurean Emotions,” 162: “Epicurean anger seems to show itself principally in the philosophical life of the Garden, in teaching and disputes; its scope overlaps with that of frankness, to which Philodemus devotes [*On Frank Speech*].” Annas argues this position against Armstrong and McOsker, “Introduction,” *On Anger*, 16.

<sup>31</sup>On the reasons for Christians continuing to receive classical education, see Neil McLynn, “Disciplines of Discipleship in Late Antique Education: Augustine and Gregory Nazianzen,” in *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, ed. Karla Pollman and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25–48; Raffaella Cribiore, “Why Did Christians Compete with Pagans for Greek Paideia?” in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 359–374.

<sup>32</sup>The most famous exception being the elder and younger Apollinaris, in Laodicea, who were reported to form a Christian school modeled on classical schools (Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.16.1–5). Julian’s edict in 361, banning Christians from teaching education, would also serve to heighten the degree of tension between Christian and pagan education.

<sup>33</sup>For an overview, see Harris, *Restraining Rage*, chap. 16.

ascend to God in a form like the one to whom it is sent.<sup>34</sup> Cyprian, likewise, emphasized forgiveness and patience in his catechetical treatise on the Lord's Prayer as part of his appeal for ecclesial unity. He encouraged catechumens to undertake prayer with a posture of moderation and discipline, maintaining control of their bodies and voices.<sup>35</sup> Nowhere, however, does anger receive the kind of focused attention it does in Augustine's catechumenate.

Elsewhere in Augustine's writings, we find scattered commentary on the pathos of anger in sermons and in his discussion of the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia* in *City of God* 14.9. In her detailed examination of Augustine's moral psychology, Sarah Byers helpfully parses Augustine's relation to his philosophical sources, describing his approach to the emotions as a Stoic-Platonist synthesis.<sup>36</sup> She demonstrates his dependence on the Stoic tradition, situated within a Platonic-Christian ontology, which goes against a simplistic reading of Augustine's rejection or confusion of Stoic categories of *apatheia*. Augustine, Byers shows, appropriated the Stoic distinction between "preliminary passions," which arise unconsented as a movement of the soul (*motus animi*), and the passions themselves (*perturbationes*), which require the mind's consent.<sup>37</sup> In sermons, we find two key biblical images related to vision that articulate this distinction as it pertained to anger: (1) the irritated eye that becomes blind and (2) the speck that becomes a plank in one's eye (Matthew 7:5). Both of these visual pictures of anger entail, furthermore, the loss of divine illumination—"the sun going down" on one's wrath (Ephesians 4:26).<sup>38</sup>

In Augustine's world, reflection on anger was as important as it was varied. Among rhetoricians and philosophers, both Christian and non-Christian, anger warranted careful reflection and advice for moderation or expulsion. While anger was evaluated and treated differently, all were agreed on the profound importance of this *pathos* in the quest for beatitude.

## II. The Catechumenate as an Institution for Cultivating Patience

Anger and other emotions, however, were not only topics for contemplation in learned treatises. Institutions and social arrangements were also necessary for promoting certain emotional discourses. In what remains, I want to consider Augustine's catechumenate as an instance of the institutional structuring of emotions related to anger. In the present section, we will see how Augustine interpreted the catechumenate itself as an institution for cultivating patience—a time for learning patience in the "womb" of mother church. In subsequent sections, I consider in more depth the way in which Augustine's sermons to catechumens deployed cognitive and spiritual exercises for treating the *pathos* of anger.

Augustine's view of the catechumenate as an institutional context for generating patience stemmed in part from an ongoing tradition within North African

<sup>34</sup>Tertullian, *On Prayer* 12.1.

<sup>35</sup>Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 4.

<sup>36</sup>Byers, *Perception*, 100–126. See also Luc Verheijen, "The Straw, the Beam, the *Tusculan Disputations* and the Rule of Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 17–31, and, more generally, Gertrude Gillette, *Four Faces of Anger: Seneca, Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian, and Augustine* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010).

<sup>37</sup>Byers, *Perception*, 111.

<sup>38</sup>See the citations and potential sources at Byers, *Perception*, 111–115.

Christianity about the proper amount of time and the overall purpose of the catechumenate.<sup>39</sup> Tertullian had warned about the rash reception of baptism and advised waiting until candidates had matured intellectually and were thus able to appreciate the gravity of sin and the significance of baptism.<sup>40</sup> He critiqued heretical movements for allowing catechumens to have unrestricted access to sacred Christian rituals and prayers, though he could easily turn and attack Valentinians for promulgating a pretentious five-year initiation that traded on intrigue instead of intellection.<sup>41</sup> In Cyprian's era, African bishops debated whether those who sought baptism from competing Christian groups, such as the Novatians, needed to repeat the process of catechesis and baptism or whether the simple laying on of hands from a legitimate bishop would suffice. Centuries later, these debates lingered on as Augustine debated in *On Faith and Works* with certain anti-Donatist reactionaries about the moral strictures required for baptismal candidates.<sup>42</sup> Against those who would say, "Baptize him first . . . and later teach him about leading a good life," Augustine appealed to a tradition of taking an appropriate amount of time for instruction in morals as well as doctrine: "What is all that time for, when they hold the status of catechumen, if it is not for them to hear what a Christian should believe and what kind of life a Christian should lead, so that when they have proved themselves, they may eat from the table of the Lord and drink from his cup?"<sup>43</sup> Such, after all, had been customary ever since the church had established the status of catechumens as an official role in the church.<sup>44</sup>

Teaching the Lord's Prayer to baptismal candidates had long been a part of the North African catechetical tradition. Both Tertullian's and Cyprian's expositions of the Lord's Prayer likely originated in prebaptismal catechesis.<sup>45</sup> The liturgical placement of the Lord's Prayer immediately prior to the Eucharist, combined with the insistence that only those made children of God in baptism could call upon God as "Father," provided the theoretical structure for reserving the Lord's Prayer for the baptized alone.<sup>46</sup> However, this presented an issue about whether to teach the prayer before or after baptism. Ambrose of Milan and Cyril of Jerusalem both taught it afterward, while Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, and Peter Chrysologus taught it beforehand.<sup>47</sup> The potential objection to teaching it beforehand was: How could someone not yet born in the waters of baptism be allowed to pray the reserved family prayer? Making a theological point out of this liturgical custom, Augustine explained that catechumens were taught the prayer beforehand because they had been conceived by God as seeds

<sup>39</sup>On the catechumenate as a contested tradition in Augustine's North Africa, see Pignot, *Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa*.

<sup>40</sup>Tertullian, *On Baptism* 16; *On Penitence* 6.

<sup>41</sup>Tertullian, *On the Prescription against Heresies* 41; *Against the Valentinians* 1.

<sup>42</sup>On this text and its relation to the catechumenate, see Matthieu Pignot, "Setting Rules for Becoming Christian: Augustine's Polemical Treatise *De fide et operibus* in Context," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 64, no. 1 (2018): 73–114.

<sup>43</sup>Augustine, *On Faith and Works* 6.9; I. Zych, ed. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 41:45; WSA I/8:231–232.

<sup>44</sup>Augustine, *On Faith and Works* 6.9.

<sup>45</sup>See Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 22–24.

<sup>46</sup>Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 9.

<sup>47</sup>For comparison, see Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington, DC: Consortium Press, 1974).

within the maternal womb of the church.<sup>48</sup> They were children of God “in utero.”<sup>49</sup> When they joined the rank of catechumens, they received the sign of the cross on the forehead, a laying on of hands, and salt on the tongue.<sup>50</sup> In one sermon, Augustine signaled this rite as the catechumen’s “conception” into the womb of the church in anticipation of their baptismal birth.<sup>51</sup> Christians became, as it were, living fetuses during the catechumenate when they underwent this rite and received the name of Christ (*nomen Christi*).

The image of church as mother was prominent in early African Christianity,<sup>52</sup> as was the image of the baptismal font as womb.<sup>53</sup> Augustine, however, pressed the metaphor in ways that allowed the catechumenate to be viewed as a pedagogical institution for instilling patience and delimiting the pathos of anger. The image of the maternal church occurs explicitly in one of Augustine’s sermons to *competentes* on the rite of scrutiny, where Augustine encourages them not to “agitate the maternal womb impatiently” by receiving baptism prematurely.<sup>54</sup> This interpretation is borne out more fully in an anti-Donatist sermon on Psalm 57, in which Augustine explains how Christians are to hold together both charity and truth. Interpreting Psalm 57:4, “Sinners have been alienated from the womb; they have gone astray from the stomach; they have spoken

<sup>48</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.5. For a similar view, see *Sermons* 59.3, 216.7; *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 12.3. At *Sermon* 59.7, however, Augustine affirms that they do not actually pray the prayer as catechumens but instead memorize it in order to return (*redditio*) it upon baptism. On other occasions, Augustine will simply reiterate that only the baptized can recite the Lord’s Prayer: *Sermons* 398.8.16, 181.6. For these references, see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 339n174.

<sup>49</sup>One of the leading medical views in Augustine’s day understood the human fetus to exist first in an “unformed” and then a “formed” state (which occurred after forty days for males, ninety for women), based on an Aristotelian notion that the soul’s animation of the body constituted the living person. See John Bauerschmidt, “Abortion,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1. Augustine will develop this analogy in comparison to Roman practices of abortion and infanticide. Whereas the Roman *paterfamilias* needed to limit the number of children in his family in order not to reduce them to poverty, the Christian’s *pater* had an abundant *oikonomia* in which as many children were welcome as possible. See Augustine, *Sermon* 57.2, and compare *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 2.13. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 340.

<sup>50</sup>See Augustine, *Confessions* 1.11.17; *On Catechizing the Uninstructed* 26.50; *On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins* 2.26.42.

<sup>51</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 260C.1. Harmless, “Catechumens, Catechumenate,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 146.

<sup>52</sup>Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20.5; Cyprian, *On Unity* 5–6. The image also appears in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.33.11. On North Africa, however, see Sebastian Tromp, “Ecclesia Sponsa Virgo Mater,” *Gregorianum* 18 (1937): 3–29; Joseph Conrad Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1943); Karl Delahaye, *Ecclesia Mater chez les pères des trois premiers siècles, pour un renouvellement de la pastorale d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964); Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church: Particular Churches in the Universal Church*, trans. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1971); Bradley M. Peper, “The Development of Mater Ecclesia in North African Ecclesiology” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2011). David Rankin argues that Tertullian’s use of the maternal image reveals a shift from early conceptions of comfort and nourishment to the more polemical use of clarifying ecclesial boundaries. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80–81.

<sup>53</sup>See Zeno of Verona, *Tractates* 1.32, 55; Paulinus of Nola, *Letter* 32.5; Augustine, *Sermons* 119.4, 121.4; Quodvultdeus, *Sermon* 1. On this theme, see Robin Jenson, “Mater Ecclesia and Fons Aeterna: The Church and Her Womb in Ancient Christian Tradition,” in *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 127–153.

<sup>54</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 216.7–8; ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia cursus completus: Series Latina* 38 (Paris: Migne, 1865), 1080–1081; WSA III/6:171–172.

falsehoods,” alongside Galatians 4:19’s picture of Paul “laboring” for the Galatians “until Christ may be formed in them.”<sup>55</sup> Augustine draws together a series of arguments that link ecclesial unity with the virtue of patience as the precondition for perceiving truth—the womb in Psalm 57 signifies the ecclesial womb in which “charity was agonizing (*patiebatur*) in labor pains.”<sup>56</sup> Though a person may still be “carnal,” he or she has nonetheless been “conceived. . . by the very fact of receiving the name of Christ,” and so has been “sacramentally born within the bowels of your mother.”<sup>57</sup> Christians, therefore, who have been conceived in the womb through the ritual of receiving the name of Christ are to remain in the womb until they have become fully matured. They should not succumb to the pretense of knowledge before attaining a certain level of competence but should remain patiently within the maternal womb—“until you are fully formed, until the truth you are taught is firmly set in you.”<sup>58</sup> The Donatists, meanwhile, according to Augustine, are said to be impatient because they reject a full-term labor and have exited the womb before the allotted time. Without such time, however, they cannot apprehend truth, for it is only from the “the womb of truth that I recognize Christ, who is truth itself, and from the mouth of truth I recognize the Church, which participates in truth.”<sup>59</sup> The reason seems somewhat circular if we do not grasp the importance of catechetical patience. Being fully formed in the womb of charity through catechesis gives Christians the requisite time for the purifying vision necessary to discern Christ.

In these moments, we can see Augustine reflecting on the institution of catechesis as a time for transforming the vice of impatience into the virtues of patience and forbearance. To cultivate patience, the baptismal candidate needed to remain a catechumen for the full duration of the period, not rejecting the maternal womb of the church too abruptly. The time of the catechumenate was a time of learning patience. In the reformation of desire that was the aim of the Christian life, the institution of catechesis, by its very nature, served in Augustine’s mind to instill these foundational emotions.

### III. The Lord’s Prayer and the Transformation of Desire

Having glimpsed the broader picture of Augustine’s catechumenate as a time of cultivating patience, we are now positioned to observe several exercises that Augustine proposed for his hearers to guide the transformation of anger into patience. The category of spiritual exercises is a fruitful, though perhaps unexpected, category for considering prayer. Sarah Byers, for example, does not consider prayer as an appropriate category for Augustine’s affective therapies because she understands prayer more narrowly as the petitioner’s request for God to remove some impediment to well-being rather than an active exertion on the part of the one who prays.<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Teubner, by contrast, makes the category of *exercitatio* central to his study of prayer in Augustine.<sup>61</sup> For Teubner, the Lord’s Prayer functions “as something like an ‘exercise manual’ for

<sup>55</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.5; CCL 39:713; WSA III/17:126.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.5; CCL 39:713; WSA III/17:127.

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.5; CCL 39:713; WSA III/17:127.

<sup>58</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.5; CCL 39:713; WSA III/17:127.

<sup>59</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.6; CCL 39:714; WSA III/17:128.

<sup>60</sup> Byers, *Perception*, 153.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Teubner, *Prayer after Augustine: A Study in the Development of the Latin Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

prayer.”<sup>62</sup> I would add that another way to locate prayer in terms of spiritual exercise is to consider prayer in catechesis—an institutional context for *teaching* prayer. It is not prayer as such but a second-order discourse on the language and, concomitantly, the emotions of prayer. The context of oral, dialogical instruction, coupled with exhortations to repetition and memorization and to actualize in one’s life what is learned in teaching, suggests a teaching context grounded in the spiritual exercises tradition.<sup>63</sup> Regarding anger and forgiveness in particular, we find Augustine exhorting his hearers “to stretch themselves out to the perfection of forgiveness.”<sup>64</sup> Forgiveness was a state of being to which one could progress in stages of growth through exercise. Prayer, especially in the context of catechesis, functioned very much like the spiritual exercises of antique philosophy.

For Augustine, ever the theologian of desire, a catechesis on prayer functioned chiefly as a set of spiritual exercises in which to shape a proper desire for God and love of neighbor instead of the desire for vengeance. In *Sermon 56*, Augustine invites his hearers to imagine the Lord’s Prayer as the “form of desires” (*forma desideriorum*). After raising the question of why Christians pray if an omniscient God already knows what they need, Augustine explains: “The reason he wanted you to pray is so that he might give to a desiring person, so that what has been given does not become cheapened. This desire is something he himself has instilled. So, then, the words our Lord Jesus Christ taught us in his prayer give us the form of desires. You are not allowed to ask for anything else except what is written here.”<sup>65</sup> The Lord’s Prayer is, for Augustine, a divine gift of speech, which instills into Christians the form of desires. Form, in this passage, might mean, on the one hand, the practical framework or limits of what ought to be prayed. Christians are not to ask for anything besides what is written here, even if they use different words.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, form could also be said to retain the more Platonic sense of an ideal reality. In this case, the Lord’s Prayer could be seen to offer a vision of true Christian desire. It provides Christians with the proper shape of their desires. If, as Augustine says elsewhere, desire itself is the Christian’s prayer, and desire is necessary for capacitating the Christian to receive God’s gifts, then it would be imperative to teach the Lord’s Prayer as a way of reforming desire.<sup>67</sup> The Lord’s Prayer as the “form of desires” is something graciously given, yet through daily practice exercises and realigns Christian desires.

#### IV. Spiritual Exercises for Anger Management

In what remains, we can consider the catechetical sermons on prayer as spiritual exercises for treating the *pathos* of anger, organized around five topics. The first two entail a theological analysis of prayer and a therapeutic analysis of anger, respectively. The final three are more proactive remedial therapies: contemplation of human nature, meditation on scriptural and hagiological exempla, and engagement in inner dialogue. One

<sup>62</sup>Teubner, *Prayer after Augustine*, 80.

<sup>63</sup>For Augustine’s advice about daily memorization of the creed, see Augustine, *Sermon 58.13*. On repetition in spiritual exercises, see Galen, *On the Passions and Errors* 1.5.24; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.1.1; 5.1.1, referenced in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 85.

<sup>64</sup>Augustine, *Sermon 56.14*; CCSL 41Aa:165; WSA III/3:103. See also *Sermon 56.16*.

<sup>65</sup>Augustine, *Sermon 56.4*; CCSL 41Aa:156; WSA III/3:97.

<sup>66</sup>See also Augustine, *Letter 130 (Letter to Proba)*, esp. sec. 11.21–12.22.

<sup>67</sup>Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 37.14*; CCSL 38:392; WSA III/16:156–157. See also Teubner, *Prayer after Augustine*; Rebecca Weaver, “Prayer,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 671.

could easily offer other categories, or other examples that fall within these categories, but the following presents one way to understand the institutional shaping of emotions in Augustine's catechesis.

First, Augustine provides a theological vision of prayer as a remedy to anger, considering what prayer is and to whom one prays. In *Sermon 56*, Augustine introduces the Lord's Prayer through a discussion on anger and the desire for revenge, drawing attention to the potentially counterevidential examples of the imprecatory psalms. In prayer, Augustine says, there are two items of which to be aware: "asking for what you should not ask and asking for it from someone you should not ask it from."<sup>68</sup> One should neither seek good things from the wrong source—for example, asking for life and health from the Devil—nor seek wicked things from the one true God. In the latter category Augustine places the petitioning of God for an enemy's downfall. What, however, of the imprecatory psalms? When the Psalmist, an exemplar of justice, asks for evil to come upon his enemy, is he not modeling just the opposite of what Augustine here counsels?<sup>69</sup> To this, Augustine replies that the Psalmist is making a prophetic utterance, not a model for Christian prayer. The Psalmist has divine insight into the mysteries of divine providence and so can proclaim such judgments. Augustine's catechumens, by contrast, are no prophets or seers: "How do you know that the person for whom you are asking evil will not become better than you in the future?"<sup>70</sup> Augustine's theological analysis of anger begins by locating the Christian framework of prayer. He also reflects on the relationship between divine grace and human effort to convince his hearers that loving one's enemies is genuinely possible:

Exert yourselves, my dearest friends, to attain this perfection, I implore you. But is it I who have given you the capacity to do so? He has given it to you, the one to whom you say, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth." However, you must not assume it is impossible. I know, I have learned, I have satisfied myself that there are Christian people who love their enemies. If it seemed impossible to you, you would never do it. First of all, believe that it can be done and then pray that God's will may be done.<sup>71</sup>

Christians are to seek good things from the one, true God, and they are to do so in recognition of the fact that they do not know the future state of things. They are to entrust to God that which God alone knows, and they are to hold firm to the conviction that forgiveness of one's enemies is really possible.

Second, Augustine offers a therapeutic analysis of anger. In dialogue with the philosophical traditions, Augustine correlates anger with the inability to attain the vision of God. Commenting on Psalm 6:7, "My eye is troubled for anger," Augustine warns his hearers not to consider anger lightly, for "When the eye is troubled, he cannot see the sun; if he tries to, it gives him pain, not pleasure."<sup>72</sup> Augustine goes on to parse the difference between anger, which is "lust for revenge" (*libido uindictae*), and hatred, which

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.2*; CCSL 41Aa:154; WSA III/3:96, alt.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.3*; CCSL 41Aa:154–55; WSA III/3:96.

<sup>70</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.3*; CCSL 41Aa:155; WSA III/3:96.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.14*; CCSL 41Aa:165; WSA III/3:103.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 58.8*; CCSL 41Aa:207; WSA III/3:122.

is “inveterate anger” (*ira inueterata*).<sup>73</sup> Augustine provides several analogies for the relation between the two:

What was anger when it was new has become hatred, because it has turned old and musty. Anger is a speck, hatred a beam. Sometimes we rebuke someone for getting angry, and we are nursing hatred in our hearts; and Christ says to us, “You see the speck in your brother’s eye, and you do not see the beam in your own eye (Luke 6:41; Matt. 7:3). How has the speck managed to grow, to make a beam? Because it wasn’t immediately plucked out. Because you allowed the sun to go out and come in so many times upon your anger, you made it old; you raked up evil suspicions, and you watered the speck, and by watering it you reared it, and by rearing it you made it into a beam.”<sup>74</sup>

Augustine’s paradigm is closely related, as mentioned previously, to the correlation of the dominical image of the speck versus the beam in one’s eye (Matthew 7:3–5) with the Stoic conception of preliminary passions and real passions.<sup>75</sup> When the preliminary passion of anger appears as a speck in the eye, if acted upon, it may grow into a massive beam—hatred. The consequence is that, with troubled vision, the Christian cannot enter the light of God. With a beam in one’s eye, to look upon God’s light becomes pain, not pleasure.

Defining anger as “lust for revenge,” Augustine can also highlight the especially pernicious nature of vengeance, singled out as a more dangerous spiritual threat than other sins. While all sins can be dangerous, the desire for revenge poses a particularly acute challenge because of the way it deprives the Christian from the healing obtained through daily repentance and forgiveness—chiefly in praying the Lord’s Prayer itself. In *Sermon* 57, he thrice describes anger as a *horrenda temptatio*—“a frightful temptation, which deprives us of the possibility of being healed of the wounds inflicted by other temptations.”<sup>76</sup> While avarice or lust, for example, may arrive as an unwanted preliminary passion, one can still pray, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive others,” and so find recourse for alleviating the dangers of the temptation. One can seek forgiveness, so long as one continues to forgive others. With vengeance, however, the situation is more dire:

So what is that horrible temptation to which I referred, so grievous that it is to be dreaded, to be shunned with all your strength and all your might? . . . It is when we are prompted to avenge ourselves. Anger is kindled, and a person burns to be avenged. What a frightful temptation! Through this, you forfeit the means by which you were going to win pardon for your other offenses. If you had sinned through other senses, other cravings, this is how it was to be remedied, because you were going to say, “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” The fellow who provokes you to avenge yourself will rob you of what you were going to say—“as we also forgive our debtors.” When you have forfeited that, all your sins will be held against you; absolutely nothing is forgiven.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 58.8; CCSL 41Aa:207; WSA III/3:122.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 58.8; CCSL 41Aa:207; WSA III/3:207–208.

<sup>75</sup> In another catechetical sermon on the creed, Augustine mentions the seriousness of anger by comparing it to a root that grows into a tree. Augustine, *Sermon* 211.1–7.

<sup>76</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 57.11; CCSL 41Aa:188; WSA III/3:115.

<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 57.11; CCSL 41Aa:188–89; WSA III/3:115, alt.

The desire for vengeance is especially malignant because it cuts one off from the means of receiving forgiveness. Vengeance itself negates the means of remedying forgiveness, which is found in correlation with forgiving others. Augustine goes on to explain that Christ was aware of this danger, which is why, after commenting on the petitions of the prayer, Christ impressed upon his disciples the importance of this petition more than the others: “The other [petitions] did not need to be commended as much; if you are a sinner, you can recognize whence it is cured. What had to be commended was the sin that deprives you, if you commit it, of means by which the rest are cleansed.”<sup>78</sup> The daily praying of the Lord’s Prayer, in Augustine’s estimation, was instrumental to the process of healing, serving as a constant reminder to forgive one’s enemies and to remove the speck from one’s own eye so that it does not develop into deep-seated hatred.

A third approach Augustine takes in teaching the Lord’s Prayer as a form of spiritual exercise is contemplating human nature. In the spiritual exercises tradition, contemplating nature—whether the nature of the world or the nature of the human person—was a critical exercise in treating the passions.<sup>79</sup> Augustine utilizes a form of this spiritual exercise when he implores *competentes* to consider what it is about their human enemy that is malicious. Augustine counsels his hearers to distinguish between an enemy’s human nature, which is the same as one’s own nature, and his fault or “ill-nature.” One’s enemy is of the same psychosomatic constitution, animated by the same God; they are even, Augustine says at one point, of the “same substance” (*consubstantialis*) as one another.<sup>80</sup> Contemplating human nature is meant to alter the way one interacts with an enemy. “It is not the human nature in [your enemy] that is hostile to you,” he explains, “but the fault in it.”<sup>81</sup> For Augustine, a clear distinction between the divinely created human nature, which is good, and postlapsarian fallen nature, which is prone to sin, is crucial. What one opposes in one’s enemy is the fault (*culpa*), the sin, not his or her human nature. In that sense, then, one can pray for an enemy’s downfall, but in doing so, “one prays against his malice (*malitiam*), not against his nature (*natura*). You pray for that to die and that he may live.”<sup>82</sup> This is more obviously true among fellow Christians who hold the same God as father and the same church as mother. But it even holds true if one’s enemy is a “pagan, Jew, or heretic.”<sup>83</sup> Not knowing whether the person will become a Christian tomorrow, the Christian is to pray for his or her conversion rather than for ill. For Augustine, forgiving one’s enemies is a desideratum for all Christians, and is aided by careful reflection on human nature.

A fourth kind of spiritual exercise that Augustine develops in these sermons is offering biblical models and Scriptural images to assuage anger. Christ himself is the chief model of patient forgiveness, forgiving his accusers from the cross, followed chiefly by the saints. While it is human nature to avenge, the divine path entails the patience of forbearance. “Christ has not yet been avenged; the holy martyrs have not yet been avenged! God’s patience is still waiting for Christ’s enemies to be converted, for the enemies of the martyrs to be converted. Who are *we* to insist on vengeance?”<sup>84</sup> The primary

<sup>78</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 57.12; CCSL 41Aa:189; WSA III/3:115, alt.

<sup>79</sup>See Hadot, *Philosophy a Way of Life*, 87–88.

<sup>80</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.14; CCSL 41Aa:166; WSA III/3:103.

<sup>81</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.14; CCSL 41Aa:166; WSA III/3:103.

<sup>82</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.14; CCSL 41Aa:166; WSA III/3:103.

<sup>83</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.14; CCSL 41Aa:166; WSA III/3:103.

<sup>84</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 58.8; CCSL 41Aa:206–207; WSA III/3:122.

mode of patience to which the Christian is to aspire is God's form of patience, which waits upon an enemy's conversion rather than promulgating instant judgment. If one objects to the difficulty of imitating God, however, Augustine can also point to examples like Stephen, who also prayed for his enemies rather than taking vengeance.<sup>85</sup> Augustine does not here offer a more detailed account of Christ's fully human nature, which would seem to have aided his argument. In this setting, he is content to allow his hearers to find biblical models for patient forgiveness wherever they can.

Another form of scriptural reflection on anger comes in Augustine's commentary on the language of the Lord's Prayer. In his explication of the petition for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven," Augustine builds on his North African predecessors to provide a constellation of interpretations by which to understand themselves and their enemies.<sup>86</sup> Heaven and earth can be understood, variously, as the celestial church and the earthly church, the soul and the body, or Christians and non-Christians. In each instance, Augustine emphasizes that the "earthly" constituent is to be transformed into that which is heavenly. Augustine particularly highlights the third paradigm—that of heaven and earth as a figure of Christians and non-Christians—in his encouragement to pray for one's enemy's conversion rather than judgment:

We have been urged, you see, to pray for our enemies. Heaven is the Church, earth the Church's enemies. So what is "Thy will be done in heaven and on earth"? May our enemies believe as we too believe in you; may they become friends and put a stop to hostilities. They are earth, which is why they are opposed to us; may they become heaven, and they will be with us.<sup>87</sup>

In enabling his hearers to envision the process of forgiveness, Augustine utilizes positive examples and scriptural images. These are not merely decorative metaphors but intricate ways of structuring his hearers' affective capacities for the Christian life.

Fifth and finally, Augustine appropriates for his catechumens a version of the spiritual exercise of inner dialogue.<sup>88</sup> He draws his hearers' attention away from external disputants and toward a conversation with themselves. "Attend to yourself," he counsels, following a venerable line of philosophical and patristic therapy.<sup>89</sup> No exterior enemy can inflict harm if one is attentive to one's inner life, for the devil holds no power over those who love their enemies. The Devil can destroy home or livelihood if given authority to do so. But the Devil cannot inflict harm upon one's soul.<sup>90</sup> In *Sermon 57*, Augustine challenges his hearers to focus not upon their external threats but upon their thoughts and desires:

The conflict continues, you see, in your own selves. You need not dread any foe outside; conquer yourself, and you have conquered the world. What is an external tempter going to do, whether it is the devil or the devil's agent? . . . You are not aware of this foe of yours, but you are aware of your desires (*non sentis hostem tuum, sed sentis concupiscentiam tuam*). You cannot see the devil, but you can

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.16*; CCSL 41Aa:168; WSA III/3:104.

<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *Sermons 56.8, 57.6, 58.4, 59.5*.

<sup>87</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.8*; CCSL 41Aa:159; WSA III/3:99.

<sup>88</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 89–93; Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, 18–61.

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.14*; CCSL 41A:165; WSA III/3:102.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 56.14*; CCSL 41A:165; WSA III/3:102.

see what gives you pleasure. Conquer what you are aware of inside you (*uince intus quod tu sentis*).<sup>91</sup>

In this instance, Augustine focuses on the battle imagery, but redirects that battle from external physical opponents to the Christian's internal desires. They are to attend to that which they can control instead of that over which they have no control.

In another instance, Augustine uses the exercise of internal dialogue to direct his hearers' focus to they themselves rather than their enemies. If someone desires an enemy's downfall, claiming to know his or her sinister disposition, Augustine turns the question around.<sup>92</sup> Rather than focusing on the enemy's disposition, which one cannot actually know, the Christian should look to the state of his or her own soul, which can be known better. Disrupting this form of pride, Augustine redirects attention from one's enemy to one's interior person; and this turn to inner dialogue is meant to encourage hopefulness for the enemy's conversion. Like the early disciples who prayed for the persecutor Saul, Christians do not know if an enemy today may become a friend tomorrow.<sup>93</sup> Augustine invites his catechumens to a soliloquy with a different appreciation of time, a time that is patient of today's ambiguities in hopefulness of the possibility of friendship tomorrow.

## V. Conclusion

Augustine's catechetical homilies on prayer provide a rich site for reflection on prayer as a spiritual exercise for treating the *pathos* of anger. More generally, they suggest how Augustine's catechumenate figured as a key institution for transposing key classical discourses about anger into Christian society. In these sermons, Augustine aimed to cultivate the virtues of forgiveness and patience through transforming anger, the desire for revenge, into the desire for God, holding up the Lord's Prayer as the "form of desires." He imagined the catechumenate itself as a time for cultivating patience and forbearance, and he provided a series of cognitive and spiritual exercises for understanding and healing anger. While other Christian authors discussed anger in different settings, few of them discussed anger within the institutional context of catechesis as fervently as did Augustine. In observing his catechetical homilies to catechumens on prayer, we perceive more clearly the ways in which particular institutions helped spread and solidify certain emotional ideals.

Augustine's sermons on prayer to catechumens, therefore, contribute to a more general understanding of the way in which Christian educational institutions adopted and transformed pedagogical traditions in the Graeco-Roman world. While a concern for studying anger had previously occupied only the elite students of the rhetorical or philosophical schools, the introduction and intense focus on anger in Augustine's catechumenate ensured that an institutional "emotionology" would be transmitted at a broader and more popular level, establishing a framework for generations of Christians to imagine and experience the emotions of anger in particular ways. Augustine's catechumenate, in short, was a key pedagogical institution in late antiquity

<sup>91</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 57.9; CCSL 41Aa: 186; WSA III/3:114, alt.

<sup>92</sup>Augustine, *Sermon* 56.3; CCSL 41Aa:155; WSA III/3:96.

<sup>93</sup>This admonition will recur in *On Faith and Works* 1.1.

that contributed to the shaping of Western discourses on the nature of anger and forgiveness. These were not merely sermons on prayer but a complex set of practices and the embodiment of a social ideal in which certain affective postures were scripted and made normative in early Christianity.

**Alex Fogleman** is research project manager for the Global Flourishing Study at Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion. He also teaches courses for Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and directs the Institute for the Renewal of Christian Catechesis. His research focuses on several topics in Latin and Greek patristic theology and late antique education. His current book project is on epistemology and pedagogy in early Christian catechesis.

---

**Cite this article:** Fogleman, Alex. "Anger, Prayer, and the Transformation of Desire: Augustine's Catechumenate as an Emotion-Shaping Institution." *Church History* 91, no. 2 (June 2022): 227–244. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640722001342>.