

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beatific embodiment: An Augustinian appraisal of our end-time embodiment

Sean Luke

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, USA
Email: zsluke@tiu.edu

Abstract

In this paper, I seek to articulate a positive role for the body in our eschatological joy in God. I draw on Augustine's thought to argue that the body makes a positive contribution to our joy in God by being a pedagogy for our imaginations, training us to imagine the beautiful character of God in Christ through embodiment. While Augustine might seem like a surprising choice for this task, I argue that his concepts of *ubique totus* and the *totus Christus* provide fertile soil for the growth of an eschatological theology of the body.

Keywords: Augustine; beatific vision; embodiment; eschatology; *totus Christus*; *ubique totus*

Christians believe Jesus Christ to be the very *Logos* of God; he is the *Logos ensarkos*, or the enfleshed Word. If this conviction is true, that means that God himself elected to take up humanity into divinity; God graciously predestined the human body for participation in the divine glory. God intends to reveal his redeeming love to creatures by gracing their bodies in the eternal Son.

How, precisely, do our bodies contribute to our eschatological joy in God? In the Christian tradition, satisfactory answers are scarce. Hans Boersma demonstrates that a particular line of Christian thought sees the body as little more than a receptacle for glory in the soul as the soul overflows into the body, but the body doesn't itself contribute anything.¹ Though St Augustine is often placed within this tradition, his thought contains rich resources that provide an Augustinian appraisal of the body's unique contribution to the beatific vision of God. By relating Augustine's doctrines of *ubique totus* and the *totus Christus* through his semiotics, I propose that the beatific vision comes in part through *beatific embodiment*: the body contributes to our eschatological joy in God by functioning as an embodied pedagogy for our imagination of and encounter with the loveliness of God. First, I will establish our conceptual toolkit, defining the relevant Augustinian terms. Second, I will apply the Augustinian doctrines to articulate the role of our body in our end-time enjoyment of God. Third, I will draw these threads together to sketch 'beatific embodiment'. Finally, I will conclude by describing how this account can be called 'Augustinian'.

¹Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018).

Resourcing Augustine: *Ubique totus, totus Christus*, and semiotics

In this section, I will define Augustine's conception of the above doctrines and highlight how these doctrines are consistent with other elements of his thought which will be useful to developing a theology of the eschatological body.

In a famous passage near the end of *City of God*, Augustine tries to answer the question: 'how will God be perceived in the new heavens and the new earth?' The difficulty lies in the fact that God's essence is immaterial and distinct from creation, whereas the things of earth are material. How will we see God's essence in a material, non-God environment? Augustine offers two speculative answers: we will see God's providence in utter clarity, and we will see God in all creation. According to him, if we see immaterial lives of fellow humans through material bodies, how much more shall we see God's providence operative in utter clarity throughout the whole cosmos?² And further:

Perhaps God will be known to us and visible to us in the sense that he will be spiritually perceived by each one of us in each one of us, perceived in one another, perceived by each in himself; he will be seen ... in the whole creation as it then will be seen; he will be seen in every body by means of bodies, wherever the eyes of the spiritual body are directed with their penetrating gaze.³

Thus, Augustine believes that God will be perceived via his providence, discerned in the things of earth and discerned *spiritually*. What does it mean to discern God spiritually in physical things? In his letter to a presbyter named Fortunatianus, Augustine articulates the precise conceptual difficulty at play here: since God is not some material substance spread out in the universe – and indeed, is supremely distinct from created things – then seeing a glorified material creation is *not* identical to seeing God. After all, if a created thing is not part of God's essence, then in seeing a created thing I am *not* seeing God's essence.⁴ Augustine's concern is to ward off pantheism insofar as this view makes material things part of God's essence. To see God spiritually, then, is to recognise that when one loves God, one does not love the physical sensations of fragrant smell or sweet taste, but rather a kind of fragrance and sweetness.⁵ Since God is the 'beauty of all things beautiful',⁶ the spiritual perception of God in created things involves discerning the resemblance of created things to their creator in order to *ascend*, with the intellect, from the created thing to the Creator. According to Augustine, we ought never to *enjoy* (*frui*) created things *in and of themselves* but *use* (*uti*) them to enjoy them in relation to God.⁷ Within this *uti-frui* framework, while we may exemplify *uti* – a joy in a thing which is referential to something other than a thing – towards created objects, the proper object of *frui* – enjoyment of a thing as the ultimate goal or *resting place* of a desire – is the triune God alone.⁸ Therefore, the spiritual perception

²Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 22.29.

³Ibid.

⁴'Letter 148', in St Augustine, *Letters*, vol. 3, Nos. 131–164 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953). Augustine explicitly declares that his reason for claiming that the eyes of the body cannot see God is 'to prevent men from believing that God himself is material and corporeal'.

⁵Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.6, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

⁶Ibid., 3.6.

⁷St Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. R. P. H Green (New York: OUP, 2008), 1.4.

⁸Adriaan van der Dussen, 'The Creator Blasphemed? A Critical Analysis of Van Ruler's Rejection of Augustine's Use of the Distinction between *Uti* and *Frui*', *Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 73/4 (2019), pp. 265–82.

of all things in God involves making joyful use of creation (*uti*) in order to enjoy the triune God (*frui*). Perceiving God spiritually, then, is a matter of attaining to communion with and enjoyment of God (*frui*) through a Godward enjoyment of created things (*uti*). In the eschaton, we shall be purified from sin so as to move from *uti* to *frui* seamlessly and sinlessly.

Rowan Williams highlights the semiotic connection between the *uti-frui* distinction and the *totus Christus* doctrine. Williams points out that the *uti-frui* distinction is grounded in seeing all created reality as ‘signs’ which have their meaning (or *res*) in God; since all created things (and thus all people) are signs which reference God, they can only be loved as they actually are – that is, as things with a referential character, whose meaning lies outside of themselves. Through union with Christ, the believer becomes a sanctified ‘sign’ to God by being engrafted into the supreme *signum*, the incarnate Christ.⁹ The *totus Christus* doctrine sees all *signs* (namely, members of the mystical body) as referencing the *signum* (the body’s head, Jesus) in one corporate entity: the whole Christ. To quote Augustine from his tenth homily on 1 John, ‘the sons of God are the Body of the Only Son of God, and when he is the head, we are the members, it is one Son of God’. Indeed, for Augustine, the mutual love of believers is Christ loving himself in his body, such is the strong identification of the members of Christ with Christ himself.¹⁰ Augustine even argues that Christ and believers constitute ‘a sort of entire man’ – one entity which, while receiving its identity from Jesus Christ the head, shares the identity of the head as the continuation of Jesus’ own history.¹¹ The members of Christ the head are signs of him in the world.

Importantly, Augustine gives four key qualifications to this *totus Christus* doctrine. First, Augustine insists that Christ would be complete without us. We add nothing to Jesus and depend wholly on him for our existence and perfection, not the other way round. Second, although this union is metaphysically forged by the Holy Spirit, it is decidedly non-hypostatic and so distinct from the union between divine and human natures in the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth. Third, the identity between Christ and his members is not one of numerical identity: we who are in Christ are not the head, and so are not Jesus himself. Rather, together with our righteous head, we form one entity called ‘the whole Christ’. Finally, the *totus Christus* has an eschatological dimension, insofar as the church, though really united to her head now, awaits the full realisation of this union until the eschaton.¹² This allows Augustine to avoid attribution of sin to Christ, in that the eschatological *totus Christus*, purified of sin, is the truest identity of the *totus Christus*, whilst sin is forgiven and covered over in Christ’s atonement.

With these concepts in place, we will turn to the constructive task and answer our central question: how does the glorified body contribute to our joy in God?

⁹Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 58–74.

¹⁰St Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, III/14, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2008), pp. 145–58.

¹¹St Augustine, *Exposition on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), pp. 365–6. Importantly, this differs from saying that the church is the continuation of Jesus’ *incarnation*. The church is summoned into existence by the incarnate Word, and her righteous action is constituted by Christ who lives in her (see Gal 2:20). The church is the *effect* of the incarnate Word, but not identical to him.

¹²J. David Moser, ‘Totus Christus: A Proposal for Protestant Christology and Ecclesiology’, *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 29/1 (2020), pp. 3–30.

The eschatological body as embodied pedagogy

In this section, I will first articulate the implications of *ubique totus* and *totus Christus* for the body in light of Augustine's semiotic view of reality. Then, I will synthesise these doctrines to sketch the contours of beatific embodiment.

According to Augustine, the cosmos itself is predestined to obtain divine glory. God will be 'all in all' (*ubique totus*), as St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15. Given that *bodies* are part of the created material order, it follows that bodies are meant to be a locus of eschatological revelation. That is, bodies *themselves* are meant to reveal God. But how is it possible to see God *in* bodies? Augustine hints at an answer: just as we see invisible human lives by means of their visible bodies, so shall we see God in all things.¹³ Augustine's observation is instructive in discerning exactly how we see other relevant features of human life – for our present purposes, how we see *virtue*. Humility is observed by means of coordinated bodily action. A virtuous life therefore organises bodily action into recognisable patterns manifesting a given virtue. After all, Jesus' humility in washing his disciples' feet does not merely consist in him tying a cloth around his waist or in him performing the physical washing, but rather in the whole coordinated pattern of action manifested in the upper room. This 'pattern of action' is decidedly a pattern of *bodily* action. Even God's action in the world may be analogised as a pattern of action. Augustine himself likens the disclosure of a human life in the body to God's self-disclosure in the material world. We might refine this concept by suggesting, with Kevin Vanhoozer, that God's attributes are 'schemas or shapes of God's-time-with-us-and-for-us'; that is, God's attributes are organising patterns of God's acts in the created order which correspond to the way God is in eternity.¹⁴

Furthermore, created things for Augustine are destined to bear certain *resemblances* to the divine nature. These resemblances instruct us as to who God is. For example, Augustine interprets the phrase 'wings of God' as a metaphor instructing us about God's protection, rather than a literal description of God's having wings.¹⁵ Indeed, you can even see vestiges of the Trinity (*vestigia Trinitatis*) in the very structure of reality.¹⁶ The body itself is instructive of spiritual things: just as the body is raised upright 'towards things celestial', so the mind ought to be directed towards the highest things as well – namely, God.¹⁷ Thus, the body's structure portrays in an analogical fashion the 'highness', or priority, of God in the created order. The body is therefore a kind of *sign* for the greatness and glory of God. In order to flesh out exactly how the body functions as a sign, it will be useful to update Augustine's semiotics. Charles Peirce describes three kinds of signs: an icon, index and symbol. An icon is a sign that references the thing signified via some sort of *resemblance*. Hence, a sign post with a picture of a deer signifies a 'deer crossing' by means of a resemblance between the picture and the reality of a deer. An index is a sign that signified by means of some *connectedness* to the thing signified. Hence, Augustine calls smoke a kind of 'natural sign' for fire; it leads to

¹³Augustine, *City of God* 22.29.

¹⁴Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: CUP, 2010), pp. 270–5.

¹⁵Letter 148', in Augustine, *Letters*, vol. 3, Nos. 131–164.

¹⁶St Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd edn. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 6.10.12. See Peter Leithart's excellent application of this theme in Peter Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015).

¹⁷Augustine, *Trinity* 12.1.

the knowledge of a fire by its nature, and therefore *indicates* (or indexes) a fire.¹⁸ A symbol is an artificial sign; hence, a red stop light is an artificial sign that, by societal convention, signifies a command to stop moving.¹⁹

Using this updated semiotic, we may now see exactly *how* love for bodies might exhibit *uti* leading to *frui* in God alone. The virtues of humanity, exhibited as a pattern of bodily action, may lead to the adoration of God insofar as those virtues resemble God's own intrinsic virtuousness. We might see God's own attributes embodied in a historical plotline of embodied action. In this sense, human lives are *icons* of God's own virtues insofar as the organisation of bodily life exhibited by a human resembles God's own virtues. Bodily action might also exhibit iconic similarity to God as kinds of enfleshed metaphors. In order to understand this, consider the statement, 'That man is a wolf.' As Max Black has famously pointed out, the metaphorical language is doing more than simply stating, 'That man resembles a wolf in some ways and not in others.' Rather, the word 'wolf' is a kind of reschematising filter which provides a new imaginative lens through which to see 'the man' who is a 'wolf.'²⁰ Paul Ricoeur argues that metaphorical meaning is created through 'semantic impertinence' – that is, the contradiction between the terms 'man' and 'wolf' leads the mind to resolve the contradiction, catalysing the kind of 're-schematization of concepts' Black refers to.²¹ The mind or imagination imagines 'the man' through the schema of 'wolfness' so as to find a fitting way to see the former in terms of the latter. There are obvious points of continuity and discontinuity – and 'is' and 'is-not' – that *together* yield metaphorical meaning. These insights help us understand significant metaphors God gives humanity in scripture. The Psalmist declares that God will cover his people with 'his feathers', and that Israel can find refuge 'under his wings' (Ps 91:4–5). Obviously, the Psalmist does not mean that God is a giant bird. Nevertheless, there are layers of richness to this metaphor that create a surplus of meaning. To a young chick, the feathers of its mother provide warmth, comfort and a sense of security (like curling up under a blanket on a frigid night). The 'is and is not' (God is not a bird, but he *does* provide comfort and security for those who trust him) evoke an emotion fitting to being warmed on a cold night or cared for by maternal affection. In Psalm 90:6–8, God declares that Ephraim *is* his helmet, and Judah *is* his sceptre; these images pertaining to bodily actions help us imagine God's reign and rule over the nations. Therefore, bodies and bodily action can train our imaginations to 'see God' through the pedagogy of metaphor.

Bodies can also be *indexes* of God's grace. Augustine already alludes to how this might be: God will govern the cosmos in an analogous fashion to how human lives govern their bodies. Indeed, Augustine affirms that God himself produces all good in humanity, so that every good work can be indexed to the grace of God operative in the world.²² Bodies are therefore a locus of revelation with respect to God's *acts* in history. Every act of kindness, justice, compassion, creativity, ingenuity and any other good thing worked by the hand of humans are indexes of God's work in creation. Even the reign of empires in history is attributed to God's sovereignty, such that civic good

¹⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.1.

¹⁹ Cornelis De Waal, *Peirce: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

²⁰ Max Black (ed.), *Philosophy in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003).

²² St Augustine, 'A Treatise on Grace and Free Will', in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Ser., ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), pp. 441–65.

involves God's causality while political evil involves God's permissive providence ordered towards bringing about higher-order goods.²³

Finally, bodily actions can also be symbols which God appoints (either directly or provisionally) to signify certain divine realities. Thus, 'lifting high the cross' in a church processional indicates the exaltation and enthronement of Jesus as king. The act of putting a wedding ring on one's spouse at the altar indicates an enduring commitment to the other person. The wearing of a crown symbolises kingly authority as a reflection of God's kingly authority over all things. There are myriad bodily actions that, through convention, have significations conducive to fostering the love of God and neighbour. Insofar as those bodily realities actually *do* facilitate the love of God and neighbour, these symbols are encompassed in God's providential economy of grace for the good of God's people.

Given that bodies can be revelatory of God in the above-mentioned senses, *which* bodies will function to reveal God most clearly in the eschaton? In other words, given that the *telos* of the Christian life is the beatific vision,²⁴ we can ask a more particular question: which bodies will function to facilitate a vision of the beauty of God? By employing the *totus Christus*, we can give an answer to this question. As Augustine argues, the 'whole Christ' is the 'head' and 'members', with Jesus of Nazareth constituting the head and the church constituting the members. Thus, love for the saints is a form of love for the Son, who is the radiance of the Father, and vice versa. The connection between Christ and the saints is so complete that there is 'one spiritual entity' formed from 'head and members'.²⁵ Since the head and members are embodied, our knowledge of the whole Christ (in whom we most clearly see God) necessarily involves a kind of embodied knowing. To love the Son's excellencies is therefore to love the way those excellencies are embodied in the saints, who participate in the history of Jesus by being his body and bride in the world.

Someone might object that at this juncture that I have practically abandoned the Creator–creation distinction. That is, I have *included* within love for God the love of the creature. Indeed, Vanhoozer worries about the *totus Christus* out of this very concern; that it might risk compromising the singularity and supremacy of Christ's lordship, framing the church as a continuation of Jesus' person rather than a participation *in* Jesus' person.²⁶ In order to assuage this concern and affirm the both/and (i.e. that the church is both participation and continuation in Jesus' person), we need to propose a provisional metaphysics of the *totus Christus*. I suggest that the precise sense in which the church is a continuation of Jesus' history is in an *expository* continuation. That is, the acts of the members are *illustrative* of the character of the head as displayed in the unique history of the incarnation. Through the church, we understand more *about* Jesus' life, death and resurrection; the church's acts are ordered towards the praise of her Lord *in his incarnate life*. How might this be? I think the metaphysics of the *totus Christus* can be clarified via the work and thought of Jonathan Edwards. For Edwards, all created reality is a communication of the excellencies of God – analogous to beams from a sun, or streams from an infinite, never-ending

²³ Augustine, *City of God* 5.20–6.

²⁴ See Boersma, *Seeing God*.

²⁵ Moser, 'Totus Christus'.

²⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Hocus Totus: The Elusive Wholeness of Christ', *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 29/1 (2020), pp. 31–42.

fountain. Created reality *just is* God's excellence refracted in created modalities.²⁷ In similar fashion, we might say that the *members* of the incarnate Son are expressions of his excellencies throughout history, which were embodied decisively in his saving work. The members, then, function as a kind of hermeneutical lens through which we apprehend the character of Christ embodied in his incarnation; by apprehending the Son's character, we see something of God's glory.

Beatific embodiment: How bodies help us see God

With these conceptual threads in place, we are now able to systematise the contours of beatific embodiment. We may state this proposal as such: in the eschaton, the bodies of the saints who participate in the mystical body (both our own bodies and bodies of other saints) will facilitate our enjoyment of God in Christ by being *signs* (icons, indexes and symbols) of God's beauty which teach us to fittingly imagine who God is.

The central structural 'scaffold' as it were – the 'form' that organises the Augustinian threads – is the claim that our enjoyment of God will chiefly be an enjoyment of God *in the face of Jesus*. John Owen argues that the beatific vision of God will forever be *in Christ*, given that Christ himself is the head of the redeemed cosmos and the One to whom all of creation points as its archetype.²⁸ This makes good biblical sense, given that the eschatological vision of worship is of God *and* the Lamb (Rev 21:22–27). Thus, Christ's offering up of the redeemed creation to the Father should be understood as the sweeping up of creation into the communion of love between Father and Son by the power of the Spirit. And since Christ is eternally human, the beatific vision of God in Christ will forever be a vision of God in the very humanity of Jesus. Furthermore, since the incarnational principle of *communicatio idiomatum* entails that the Son's acts in his human nature *are* the acts of God, it follows that the human nature of the Son is revelatory. In other words, the chief revelation of God is in a human body; the deity of God is revealed in his humanity, such that there is no 'God behind Jesus Christ'.²⁹

At the same time, there is no 'Christ' without his members. As Augustine suggests, Christ elects to be Christ-with-us; that is, the 'whole Christ' is head and members. The predestined, together with their righteous head, constitute the *totus Christus*. The members of the *totus Christus* are radically dependent on and referred to the head, such that Jesus Christ is complete without us and gives his members their life and meaning. The members of the Son are referential to the Son, such that the members are both an exposition and embodiment of the Son's excellencies as refracted in his incarnate life. Since both the head according to his humanity and members according to their essence are bodily, it follows that there is no *totus Christus* without human bodies. Furthermore, since the vision of God is chiefly a vision of God in Christ, and the embodied members of Christ are expositions of who Christ is – necessary for seeing Christ, as it were – it follows that the bodies of the saints reveal God by being expositions of the One in whom God is most clearly seen: Jesus Christ.

²⁷Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

²⁸Suzanne McDonald, 'Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ', in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 141–58.

²⁹Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 50–2.

The bodies of the saints are therefore predestined to be *signs* of the excellencies of Jesus of Nazareth. They are christologically referential icons, indexes and symbols. Bodies are icons, in that embodied action will instantiate the very same form of life lived by the Saviour. Thus, the humility of God crucified is the very same virtuous form instantiated in a saint's loving her enemies or washing the feet of those who hate her. The glories of Christ as the Wisdom of God are instantiated in bodily action resulting in the creation of societies, inventions, food – that is, those bodily actions of the saints that manifest wisdom iconically enfold the Wisdom of the Logos as displayed in Jesus of Nazareth. Even the features of the body – eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, its reconstituted beauty and glory through the final resurrection – will correspond to who the Son is. The bodies of the saints will be indexes in that the sanctified quality of life will flow wholly from head to members, 'for apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:3). They are symbols, insofar as various adornments (clothing, crowns, etc.) will be appropriated to the body as ways of communicating the glory of Christ. Bodies are an epistemic access point, then, to knowing and cherishing the beauty of God.

In this way, the body-as-sign is a pedagogy for the imagination. Because our knowledge of God comes *through* creaturely concepts – for we can never escape our creaturely finitude – there will always be a semiotic 'is and is not'. Our knowledge of God is therefore analogical.³⁰ The body-as-sign is one such means of disclosing analogical knowledge. Through iconic resemblances, our thoughts are fittingly reschematised to see Christ in terms of his members, similarly to metaphors reschematising thought about their subject. Through indexes of grace, our bodies correspond to the same pattern of life exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth. And through symbols, Christ communicates his rule and reign *in* his creatures. The faculty for correlating the body-as-sign and God's character is the imagination. As Vanhoozer points out, the imagination is that faculty that finds connections between things, organising those connections into a lens through which to see the world.³¹ Thus, the imagination helps make sense of a metaphor like 'That man is a wolf'. The imagination also helps a man make a decision about whom to marry, insofar as he can imagine his life with his beloved by making connections between her character now and her character in the future. In the eschaton, bodies will serve as loci for the imagination to make connections between Christ's character and God's glory.

But what, then, should we say about embodiments of *sin*? Is sin a part of the *totus Christus*, and therefore iconically revelatory? I don't think so. If union with Christ constitutes those in Christ as 'new creations', and the new-self is now the deepest truth of who the saints are, then we should understand sin as a contradiction of that truth. Sin, then, is not part of the *totus Christus* because it is no longer the truth of the identity of the saints. Any sins committed by the saints are covered over and forgiven on account of Christ's atonement, such that God sees only Christ's righteous purity manifested in his people as definitional to them. Sin, then, ironically becomes a kind of opportunity for an index; through sin, the joys of being forgiven are made known in the gratitude of the saints, who offer up their lives as blood-bought effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Though sin is not itself part of the *totus Christus*, it leads to something that is: adoration for the head by the members. This adoration will extend throughout eternity,

³⁰Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

³¹Kevin Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

as the saints learn the depths to which Jesus' blood rescues them from their damning sinfulness, 'for he who is forgiven much loves much'.

Now, one might argue that the account I have offered neglects the headship of Christ over *all* creation. After all God intends to sum up – even *head up* (ἀνακεφαλαλώσασθαι; Eph 1:10) – all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. How, then, does the *totus Christus* doctrine relate eschatological joy in the body to eschatological joy in the redeemed creation? The biblical materials give a twofold answer. The account of the fall and Paul's reiteration of its implications in Romans 8:18–25 reveal that creation exists in both a state of groaning and eager expectation for liberation. But the liberation creation longs for is decidedly a transference into the domain of the children of God. In other words, it is a freedom from a state of corruption *to* the freedom of the glory of the children of God (εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ; Rom 8:21). This glory is therefore an *embodied* glory. The creation, then, is summoned into a state of renewal by the revealing of God's redeemed, embodied people. Therefore, our bodies contribute to our joy in God by becoming *indexes* of his reordering power in the world. Just as one might come to love a doctor more for the brilliance of a cure he effects, so we will come to love the Lord more in the brilliance of his reordering power revealed in the reordering glory of our bodies; our bodies will be objects of *uti* which finds *frui* in God-as-loving-healer. And furthermore, Christ exercises headship over all creation through the nexus of created bodies. In the mystery of the eschaton, christological glory overflows from the risen Lord into our bodies so as to effect resurrection, and, in turn, that glory overflows from our bodies out into creation. In this way, creation obtains the freedom of the glory of those in Christ, turning the body into an index of God's healing love and the creation into an index of the glory of redeemed, embodied image-bearers (which is, therefore, an index of Christ's glory, since the glory of latter is the glory of Christ).

Furthermore, the redeemed body is an *icon* of the redemption of all creation, and thus iconic of God's light and life driving out darkness and decay. Jesus Christ, as the first fruits of the resurrection, is himself the inbreaking of the new creation into the present. His death and resurrection are the first fruits of the new exodus, in which all of creation passes through the death of the judgement of evil and into the glory of Christ's risen life. Bodies assimilate the created order by taking it into themselves (i.e. eating) and reconstituting it (breaking it down through biological processes). The redeemed body, in its relatedness to the redeemed creation, will be iconic of God's healing love by being a walking, living, breathing means through which creation is assimilated and reconstituted. Given the creation mandate of Genesis 1–2, I suspect this will happen not only through eating, but also through the embodied dominion the Messiah's people exercise as they reign with him forever.³²

³²I've left unaddressed the relationship of the bodies of the non-elect to the joy of God's people so as to limit the length and scope of the paper. Addressing this question with the specificity and clarity it deserves would take another paper. Nevertheless, I will offer several considerations here. First, the resurrected bodies of the reprobate, on this view, will be icons of God's justice. Retributive justice, it seems to me, functions to create an icon in the life of a perpetrator from which the seriousness of their crime may be contemplated. Thus, the outrage against Brock Turner – the Stanford swimmer who violated Chanel Miller and received a light six-month sentence – can be understood as a recognition that the sentence embodied in the history of his life created an unfitting picture or disruption of the severity of his crime. The bodies of those in hell will, as it were, tell of the severity of their rebellion against God. This will add to the joy of God's people specifically with respect to God's justice. Thus, it is not the case that God's people will love God with a kind of

Conclusion: Is beatific embodiment truly Augustinian?

In this paper, I have argued that beatific embodiment is an ‘Augustinian appraisal’ of the body. But critics of Augustine will note that I have clearly taken Augustine’s thought beyond where he himself would have taken it. Indeed, some have argued that, for Augustine, the body is little more than a receptacle of divine grace. Its transformation means that it won’t ‘get in the way’ of seeing God. While I myself used to impute this view to Augustine, I have come to disagree with this assessment of him. I’d rather view Augustine’s thinking as ‘incomplete’, since he never actually *says* that the body is a mere receptacle. Nevertheless, I will not pursue that historical theological topic here. Rather, I want to argue that this proposal is Augustinian in the following sense: it is an Augustinian *harmony*.

Many musical pieces are created by virtue of an ‘overlay’ of various themes from a composer. Thus, you may have various Mozartian themes assembled into an overarching piece that capture his brilliance. In order to do this, you typically need to build in some sort of musical ‘backdrop’ or scaffolding that can hold together the various themes in an artist’s work. I suggest that beatific embodiment is a kind of harmonising ‘overlay’ of various threads in Augustine’s thought that, when drawn together, yield the insight of beatific embodiment.

The scaffolding I have added to hold the various threads together is the claim that the eschatological vision of God is *in Christ*. Given Augustine’s emphasis on the *totus Christus*, I do not think this is an unjustified move. But when this scaffolding is added as a backdrop to the threads in his thought, a kind of picture emerges pertaining to the body’s role in catalysing the vision of God. The threads from his thought I have drawn together are his semiotics, his articulation of *ubique totus* and of the *totus Christus*. These threads, when woven together, yield a picture of the body as a sign in which God is present to give a spiritual vision of himself in Christ. On account of this ‘weaving together’, this view is deeply indebted to Augustine’s thought. At the deepest level, this proposal is Augustinian, insofar as rightly cherishing God in all things and all things in God is the heartbeat of Augustine’s thought and life. His theological contributions lead me to see more coherently how the bride of Christ will forever adore her God in the face of her righteous husband, the Lord Jesus Christ.

giddiness or delight in the suffering of the reprobate, but rather a sombre love for a God who takes evil seriously – in an analogous way to how one might delight in a judge who sentences justly.

Cite this article: Luke S (2022). Beatific embodiment: An Augustinian appraisal of our end-time embodiment. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 75, 319–328. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930622000606>