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What Might Agamben Learn from Augustine?

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Abstract

Giorgio Agamben’s references to a ‘coming community’ keep readers hunting for its characteristics, specifically for prescriptions that would signal how its political culture might be developed and maintained. His ambivalence toward Augustine prevents him, as well as readers, from discovering contributions the prelate’s preferences for compassionate collectives – which especially mark his polemical treatises, correspondence, and sermons – might make to giving a shape to the coming community that comports with many of Agamben’s other politically significant remarks.

Keywords: Agamben; Augustine; community; compassion; liturgy

Karl Jaspers’s 1947 essay on Nietzsche compares his subject to Hegel. The latter, he wrote, was misguided; Hegel imagined that a substantial statist entity would emerge at (and as) the culmination of history. Jaspers’s Nietzsche, by contrast, wrote to alert humanity to a wealth of possibilities that no statist or populist enterprise could contain.¹ One could say much the same about Giorgio Agamben, who is, as Nietzsche was, doggedly irreverent. Agamben excoriates an assortment of political sentiments that favor closure and stability as he proffers a ‘new politics’ for what he characterizes as a ‘coming community’, which will be ‘non-judicial and non-statist’.²

Agamben construes this ‘coming’ as redemptive. For him and, arguably, for Jaspers’s Nietzsche, its advent ought to be associated with an arousal or a sensitivity rather than with a fresh set of protocols or a prodigiously detailed plan for alternative polities. Agamben is out to awaken and discomfort readers who appear content to have their coffers full, their convictions determined, and their societies relatively civil. He would have readers become more critical of sovereign powers’ political pabulum, served up to make received wisdom about sovereignty and justice seem sensible. He is impatient but believes that conventional political rhetoric can keep the status quo looking fresh only so long. Still – with the media’s complicity – statist authorities have a tenacious

¹ See Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1947), pp. 257–58.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine: Note sulla politica* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), p. 89.

hold over their citizens' imaginations. Emancipation and redemption require citizens, as singularities, to enact their potential to say 'no' and hence become nonconformists and paladins of a 'new politics'. But Agamben has been criticized for leaving his passionate recommendations for remediation obscure.³ He clearly summons readers to neutralize or, he says, 'deactivate' current protocols that define duty and citizenship. He refers often to this neutralization as 'nullification' and 'profanation', which, to him, means turning to new uses of technologies meant to keep citizens captive. The aim is innovation, not renovation. But what novelties warrant endorsements?⁴

Agamben starts with the conviction that there can be no comprehensive, bureaucratic make-over. Constituting powers ordinarily become constituent powers – self-important, self-interested, and self-protective parts of 'party systems' in the public realm. So, what inevitably gets constituted, Roberto Esposito asserts, concurring with Agamben, are apparatuses. Esposito and Agamben depict them as 'machines' that proliferate to process citizens and to hold life captive. Capitalists' machines are particularly invidious. Mechanics are malicious. They harness citizens to the production of wealth and to sovereign powers' use of power.⁵ Esposito elaborates: every 'genuine revolution' does not just dismantle tyranny; it introduces new freedoms. Nonetheless, rebels tend to tilt toward tyranny, even as their rebellions achieve traction. Their constituting power develops into constituent power. Their constituent power and constitutions then suppress freedom. Erstwhile insurgents develop into institutionally pious statistes whose banalities pass as patriotism. In Esposito's frame, public realms only seem to be undergoing radical changes. But they are caught in a 'degenerative spiral' or 'vicious circle'. Esposito alleges, as does Rüdiger Voigt, that obsessions with sovereignty survive among rebels, hollowing out their promises of freedom, betraying the revolutionary spirit, and spawning sinister, dispiriting practices to preserve new elites' autonomy.⁶

Agamben agrees, seeing little to choose between fascist and supposedly insurgently democratic societies. Whereas most celebrate popular participation in the latter, he deplores exclusions, alienation, dissidents' detention, and the untruths justifying all three. He dedicates clipped, sometimes cryptic, nearly always intriguing essays and subsections of several books in his *Homo Sacer* series to exposing and vilifying the apparatuses that, in effect, board up spaces in which we live to prevent us from envisioning alternative practices and polities.⁷ He claims that juridical protocols not only disable discernment; they suppress justice. Sovereign powers pass off precedents as

³For example, see John Grumley, 'The Messianic Sovereignty and the Camps: Arendt and Agamben', *Critical Horizons*, 16 (2015), 243.

⁴See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, *Nudità* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2009), pp. 98 and 141.

⁵Roberto Esposito, *Due: La macchina della teologia politica e il posto del pensiero* (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), pp. 211–12. Compare Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), pp. 45–46, on insurgents-turned-statists. Also consult Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2006), pp. 5–7, discussing the term 'apparatus'. In this paper, the plurals, ('apparatuses' and 'protocols') refer to the cluster of practices and discourses usually associated with Foucault's disclosures about 'governmentality', networks reinforcing discipline and authority.

⁶Rüdiger Voigt, *Staatliche Souveränität: zu einem Schlüsselbegriff der Staatsdiskussion* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), p. 31; Roberto Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988), pp. 96–98 ('a vicious circle routinely swallows up every revolution [creating] a downward or degenerative spiral'.)

⁷Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 177. Also see Giorgio Agamben, *Potenza del pensiero: Saggi e conferenza* (Rome: Neri Pozza, 2005), pp. 327–28 and Andrea Russo, 'Giorgio Agamben: Il fascismo che viene, o la democrazia

truths, allowing their states of exception to become the rule – and their emergencies to become routine, whereupon internments soon become as unremarkable as gated communities and ghettos.⁸

In Agamben's estimation, sovereign powers are beyond rehabilitation.⁹ He would have readers apply Carl Schmitt's analysis of their efforts to perpetuate states of exception, enabling them to use fear to declaw calls for reform and, occasionally, to justify martial law. It is not that a 'cold war' was – or the 'war on terror' and 'cyber-attacks' are – fictions, but, Agamben explains, the extension of menace into uncertain futures is conventionally contrived to excuse tyranny and to make any life free from law look unlawful and subversive. Prolonged states of exception give sovereign powers permission to develop that 'lethal machine', Agamben says, alluding to its intimidation. And that machine (or, to be precise, statist's collections of protocols and apparatuses), he adds, dissuades citizens from engaging in what, at one point, he dignifies as the only remaining worthwhile political actions: unmasking the pretensions of constituent powers and severing life from law. Unmasking can be considered the first and most important challenge addressed in his *Homo Sacer* series. He wants to expose what he characterizes as the 'essential fictions' that statist's impose on citizens. They come in two forms: the juridical – as law – and the anomic or antinomian use of power, which parades as authority.¹⁰

Leland de la Durantaye suggests that Agamben, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, depicts this 'public and political' challenge or confrontation as 'messianic'. The changes anticipated, however, will be subtle, both personal and 'communitarian'.¹¹ The former will develop from 'the contemplation of personal potentiality' and should lead to a restoration of what Agamben calls 'possibility' (*restituita alla possibilità*). He seems to take possibility as emancipation, in this context, liberating persons to do or to defer and, in either case, to direct enterprises, including self-discovery and self-presentation, to new uses.¹² The collective or 'communitarian' consequences conceivably develop from those new uses. The *Homo Sacer* project, however, sets one condition. Whatever materializes from the resurgence of possibility – whatever freedom to do or not to – must, as William Rasch argues, call into question 'the logical structure of sovereignty' and shed conventional politics, which Agamben finds based on 'a logic of exclusion', for a 'new politics'.¹³

Agamben's critics complain that initiatives with those objectives, even if they could be called political, offer a politics without a polity. Their criticism seems valid; although two short essays in his slim volume on the *Coming Community* express his admiration for

a pugno chiusi', in *L'Uniforme e l'anima: Indagine sul vecchio e nuovo fascismo*, ed. by Russo, et al. (Bari: Action 30, 2009), pp. 169–72 and pp. 178–79.

⁸Giorgio Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: L'archivio e il testimone* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), p. 16.

⁹Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: La guerra civile come paradigma politico* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2015), pp. 76–77.

¹⁰Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), pp. 110–12.

¹¹Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 372–76.

¹²Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2014), p. 141.

¹³William Rasch, 'A Completely New Politics or Excluding the Political? Agamben's Critique of Sovereignty', *Soziale Systeme*, 8 (2002), p. 44.

one liminal and another experimental polis or collective, his allergic reaction to and recoil from ‘conditions for belonging’ seem to be insurmountable obstacles to putting any polis in place – to defining appropriate behaviors that contribute to any coming community. Agamben looks to be all about protest and profanation and ‘completely incapable of constructing [an] alternative’.¹⁴

Augustine’s convent in Hippo was one of the few collectives Agamben endorsed. He thought it an admirable setting for an unconventional ‘form of life’. He awarded extra credit, commending Augustine for having distinguished between his rules for the conventual life as nonjuridical. The *Regula*, freely adopted, attested that grace had trumped law.¹⁵ But Agamben accuses Augustine of having so extolled the effectiveness of grace in discussions of the sacraments that the character of presiding priests and character in general are of no importance.¹⁶ Augustine, for his part, would only have been able to block such blows with his chin, for the generalization about clerical character, but not about character in general, holds. Agamben’s mistake is to read Augustine’s emphasis on sin as a negation or indictment of persons’ potential.¹⁷

The argument of what follows is that, had he read Augustine’s anti-Donatist treatises, correspondence, and sermons more comprehensively, he would have discovered even more to supplement what he admired in the ‘rule’ for the prelate’s convent in Hippo Regius. Agamben then could have preempted – or addressed quite compellingly – his own critics’ complaints about the superficiality of his coming community. Instead, his misgivings about Augustine’s defenses of grace and divine omnicompetence kept him from putting Augustine to new uses. Agamben’s exasperation, in effect, made Augustine culpable for Christianity’s captivity of ‘potential’; for when the prelate’s objections to Donatism prevailed, Agamben explains, the faith irreversibly changed course. The charismatic cult gave way; the Christian church became a juridical machine, which thereafter served sovereign powers’ efforts to enforce conformity.¹⁸

Augustine, of course, saw none of that coming. He and his colleagues in Africa’s catholic Christian churches believed that neighboring Donatist bishops, insisting on the importance of the clerics’ character, in effect, denied the deity’s part in imparting grace. God, catholics maintained, was the ultimate source of sacramental grace. From the early fourth and into the fifth centuries, however, their Donatist Christian critics were preoccupied with what would pass as proximate sources, alleging that unworthy priests contaminated the sacraments insofar as compromises made during the persecutions more than a hundred years before had corrupted bishops whose consecrations, ordinations, and baptisms were bogus as a result. Agamben seems uninterested in the

¹⁴Giorgio Agamben, *La comunità che viene* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 59. For Agamben’s alleged ‘incapability’, consult Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 57–58, and, for Agamben’s ‘empty utopianism’, see Dominick LaCapra, ‘Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben’, in *Witnessing the Disaster*, ed. by Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 286–87.

¹⁵Giorgio Agamben, *Altissima povertà: Regole monastiche e forma di vita* (Milan: Neri Pozza, 2011), pp. 41–42.

¹⁶Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: Archaeologia dell’ufficio* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), pp. 102–03.

¹⁷Giorgio Agamben, *Karman: Breve trattato sull’azione, la colpa e il gesto* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2017), pp. 82–86.

¹⁸Agamben, *Opus Dei*, pp. 21–22, 33, 90.

Donatists' claims and catholic Christians' counterclaims about the schism's origin.¹⁹ On his watch, the issue of character overtakes historical considerations. He pillories Augustine for having affixed his formidable reputation to efforts to diminish the significance of agents and agency. The bishop likely would have construed his purpose differently; he simply wanted to confirm the deity's powers to use even unworthy instruments to impart grace. More important for this study, however, Agamben fur-loughs the Augustine, for whom compassionate collectives played the central role in making the grace received sacramentally (and internally) effective. But one can see why. For Augustine, the cleric is an instrument in God's toolkit. Agamben associates instrumentality with what he calls the 'paradigm of operativity' that dissolves subjectivity into its functions or operations. Emphasis on operativity has the effect of preventing subjects from being fully present in – and to – their present.²⁰ They become eviscerated creatures of command. Their defined duties – their 'having-to-be' – swallow up their being.²¹ He makes Augustine responsible for sabotaging their singularity, for clerical 'insubstantiality', and for liturgists' loss of status.²²

To Agamben, singularity is of paramount importance. Singularities are persons on the threshold of becoming what he calls 'unique whatever's' able to evacuate or set aside assigned roles (consumer; citizen), re-narrativize experiences, weigh interpretive options, and 'sign themselves into being'. They thereby create 'another world'.²³ With their 'signatures', the singularities emancipate themselves from expectations that were sewn into the lining of their civics courses. They are free from prescribed forms of life that kept them from signing up for unconventional roles.²⁴

Surprisingly, Agamben seems to discount Augustine's efforts to unleash his parishioners from their peers' less creditable expectations and from politically prescribed roles or, at least, to have them decathect or keep a discernible emotional distance while performing the latter.²⁵ And Agamben looks to be unaware of what prompted Augustine to decouple the effectiveness of the faith's rituals from presiding liturgists' characters and to link effectiveness rather transparently with the life of – and the life (or quality of affections) in – the poleis surrounding the sacraments. Agamben misses this. He fails to peg or probe Augustine's conviction that compassion among Christians

¹⁹For which, consult Timothy Barnes, 'The Beginnings of Donatism', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 26 (1975), 13–22 and Bernhard Kriegbaum, *Kirche der Traditoren oder Kirche der Martyrer: Die Vorgeschichte des Donatismus* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1986), pp. 118–27 and pp. 152–54. I use the lower case 'c' in the term 'catholic' to denote a distinction between what became the universal Catholic Church and the African churches Augustine defended, although their similarity to Christian churches elsewhere became a critical element in his defense.

²⁰Agamben, *Opus Dei*, pp. 40–41, 72, and 78–79.

²¹*Ibid.*, 87.

²²*Ibid.*, 102.

²³See Giorgio Agamben, *Signatura rerum: Sul metodo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), p. 43 and Agamben, *Stato di eccezione*, pp. 151–52.

²⁴Agamben, *Signatura rerum*, 62.

²⁵For the most often cited example, see Augustine, *civ.* 19.6. Abbreviations of Augustine's titles conform to those in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, edited by Cornelius Petrus Mayer, Erich Feldman, and others (Basel: Schwabe, 1986). The texts cited here may be accessed online at <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/index/htm>, which refers to various volumes in *Patrologiae, series Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. My translations draw from the critical edition, in various volumes of the *Corpus scriptorium ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1864).

was more conspicuous than the caliber of anyone's conscience. Seemingly virtuous philanthropists could be concealing ravenous desires for reputation. Hence, Donatists claiming the ability to gauge their priests' worthiness might overlook the wickedness stowed below the surface and only intermittently and surreptitiously affecting clerical conduct. To count on one's perceptions of a priest's character seemed misguided. Looks were deceiving; finite minds could probe only so far. Tombs were likelier than consciences to give up their secrets. To Augustine, relying on celebrity or notoriety seemed simply to be passing the responsibility for judging the sanctity of priests to others. Inasmuch as 'you trust reputations', he dared the Donatists, account for the fallibility of perceptions. 'The good can be falsely reputed to be wicked, and the wicked mistaken for the good'.²⁶ So, Donatism's premise that its sacraments were effective *ex opere operantis*, that is, due to the sanctity of those officiating, seemed terribly unstable. It depended on the infallibility of either one's inferences from observing presiding priests' behavior or on others' perceptions and inferences – on priests' reputations. For Augustine, the congregations' compassion provided more certain assurances than liturgists' apparent respectability. And he devoted multiple sermons to explaining both the importance of compassion and its compatibility with correction. He told congregants, who let their enthusiasm for discipline obscure their duties to bear with prodigals and the irresolute, that they must 'turn their hearts' and follow their God's example, 'show[ing] compassion for the weaker-willed among them'.²⁷

Admittedly, it would have been easy for Agamben to miss Augustine's position on the effectiveness of sacramental and incremental grace, *ex opere operantis ecclesiae*, on the basis of the churches' incubation of virtue and expressions of compassion. He was uninterested in the context of the prelate's assault on the Donatists' pretensions. And, for his part, Augustine understated the congregations' soterial role in encouraging a different faith, hope, and love – or compassion – that made sacramental grace effective.²⁸ From his perspective, Donatist prelates' intransigence, specifically their refusals to reconcile with catholic Christian colleagues – on terms favored by the latter – proved their lack of compassion. For Donatists, reconciliation was tantamount to capitulation and would corrupt Donatist congregations. For Augustine, however, resistance to reconciliation was a commitment to disintegration. Donatism risked accomplishing exactly what the persecutors of Christianity tried and failed to achieve. Rather than gather and tend the African flocks as good shepherds should, they saw to it that Christians remained scattered and polarized.²⁹

Donatists continued to rebaptize converts from catholic Christianity to emphasize their rivals' flawed liturgies. Augustine's response: to assume that the initial baptisms had somehow been inadequate because the presiding priests were less than devout was to think that God was powerless to provide pure water through rusty pipes. Often the only crime dissident sectarians could prove against catholic Christian clerics was that they refused to take seriously the century-old grievance keeping Donatists' resentment fresh. And the resentment, Augustine claimed, kept the love of God imparted

²⁶Augustine, *Cresc.* 2.22.27.

²⁷Augustine, *en. Ps.* 93.18.

²⁸Augustine, *civ.* 18.54.

²⁹Augustine, *bapt.* 4.12.18 and s. 266.7.

with grace and faith from developing as compassion for others. Indeed, the very survival of sectarians' collectives depended on their divisive rhetoric and on segregation that Agamben would have found unbecoming, to say the least. Even if the Donatists' accusations that occasioned the secession had been reasonable, ill will one hundred years after the allegations were formulated was not.³⁰

Ill will was not the sole property of either party. Augustine was irascible, especially after Donatist prelates refused to confer with him and sort out their differences. When compelled to do so in 411, at the Council of Carthage, they were presented with his sheaf of promises along with generous terms Augustine and his catholic colleagues offered to pry sectarian moderates from their militant colleagues.³¹ When the Donatists declined, he attacked during the council. His withering criticism of their knowledge of sacred literature as well as his unravelling of their claims to judge others' character still impress. And, because the Donatists were so judgmental and insisted on perpetuating the schism and mayhem in Africa, as if 'Africa were the only place where the purified [*purgata massa*] could be found', Augustine said, they exhibited exceedingly more about their self-righteousness than about others' unrighteousness.³²

His descriptions of their unrighteousness, lunacy, and lies were based on selective and tendentiously exaggerated readings of the evidence, as Brent Shaw correctly points out, though that does not excuse Agamben's selective reading of the polemics and his failure to register the peril catholic clerics faced.³³ Agamben portrays the Donatists as late antiquity's mainstays of agency and character, forgetting the lengths to which they went to keep resentments fresh. He also overlooks Augustine's distinction between recrimination and reconciliation, which unfolds in his anti-Donatist sermons, and, we shall discover, Agamben, therefore, misses the opportunities to relate the African prelate's case for *ex opere operantis ecclesiae* to his own efforts to conjure up a new, non-statist, non-judicial 'new politics' for his 'coming community'.

Because Augustine foregrounded reconciliation and compassion, he seemed compelled to answer Donatists' accusations that Catholic Christians' congregations neglected discipline and to explain why compassion and correction were compatible. He claimed catholic colleagues were vigilant. Prelates proceeded circumspectly, he explained, to retain congregants' confidence, yet they were unwilling to overlook improprieties for the sake of peace. They censured sinners, but to correct them. Dressing down delinquents should not utterly alienate them and jeopardize their chances for reclamation. Augustine claimed that catholic Christianity's prelatial disciplinarians were uniquely qualified; having undergone scalding self-scrutiny to test their faith and reinforce their humility, they knew how pervasive temptation was and, without forfeiting opportunities to instruct, they knew the importance of forbearance.

³⁰For example, Augustine, *un. bapt.* 14.23 and 16.27 and *Cresc.* 4.45.53.

³¹Augustine, *ep.* 128.2.

³²Augustine, *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.18 and *c. litt. Pet.* 2.102.235.

³³Compare the discussions of Augustine's exaggerations and 'fictions' in Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 668–81 and 694–95 with those in Peter Iver Kaufman, 'Donatism Revisited: Militants and Moderates in Late Antique North Africa', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 2 (2009), 131–42.

They could be prudent or politic even while they confronted and contested others' promiscuity.³⁴

Forbearance and compassion, therefore, were not symptoms of catholic Christianity's indifference to discipline but of a different, less strident approach to parishioners' susceptibilities to temptation. Yet, as we noted, Augustine was inconsistent; he let his irritation circulate through his arguments. He preached forbearance but immoderately rebuked his secessionist critics. Their recriminations, resentments, and perfectionism divided the African church, he insisted, annoyed that his rivals generally turned a deaf ear to catholic Christians' offers to reconcile. Nonetheless, he tended to overlook how those offers might have been received alongside his arraignments of the *pars Donati* for its inflexibility. He recalled that Jesus dined with the Pharisees to enlighten them. When his own invitations to the Donatists were declined, he admitted that withholding hospitality – thus shaming incorrigible offenders – should be therapeutic.³⁵ Still, that prospect worked best within catholic Christian congregations where, if Augustine may be trusted, the reformations of (and reconciliations with) sinners were widely held as desirable. Where the desire for purity had priority, as among Donatist dissidents, however, contempt for catholic Christianity masqueraded as diligence. His Donatist rivals, he complained, lost sight of the obligation to pay forward God's love and to bear with each other.³⁶

Had Donatists forgotten that they lived in 'an age of mercy' (*misericordia tempus est*), that Christians, who had been gifted with grace and forgiven by God, were obliged to forgive? Had they become so confident in their ability to tell the upright from the unrighteous that they forgot biblical lessons about limitations? Daring to pronounce categorical judgments about the conduct of others, had they forgotten their finitude? God's revelations – the good news or gospel of their sacred texts – encouraged all Christians to accept the gift of faith that gave the faithful certainty about their own salvation, but not about the salvation or perdition of others. Agamben made the Donatists protagonists of power, initiative, and discernment. Consequently, he found Augustine's views disagreeable. He was not about to caution his sectarian paladins that their judgments regarding others were fallible and ought to be tentatively proffered and circumspectly received. Augustine, to that end, maintained that prelates could never be sure whether their parishioners were gifted – and forgiven. Preachers and pastors – but congregants as well, who were prone to misperceive, to 'curse too quickly' those who meant to give no offense – lived in darkness or, in Augustine's terms, 'at night'. And, during that night or in its darkness, 'we cannot be certain of each other', one cannot peer into others' hearts, yet, the lessons and legacy left by their savior ought to put Christians on notice that 'mutual love' was expected of them; therefore, Augustine advised the clergy and laity that they should instinctively be compassionate. 'At night, temptations abound', he went on; those temptations, the darkness, but especially their lack of sight and insight made it all the more imperative that the faithful preserve their fellowships as compassionate collectives.³⁷

³⁴Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.68.154.

³⁵Augustine, *en. Ps.* 100.8.

³⁶Augustine, *f. et op.* 4.6-5.7.

³⁷Augustine, *en. Ps.* 100.12.

Jesus' lessons and legacy seemed uninfluential in secular society. Mistrust of others characterized routine commercial and explicitly political intercourse. Catholic Christians participating in both brought bad habits into church. They were 'chaff' that had been 'so mixed with the grain [*permixta*] that it was hard to tell them apart'; the trick, then, was to purge the former's wickedness from congregations without evicting the wicked.³⁸ They could prove redeemable, for their bad habits could have been acquired incidentally, inasmuch as their compromises with the ways of this world were forced upon them. Creditors had to be paid. Suits had to be litigated; order, enforced. But, to Augustine's mind, the duty rated above all the others was the love the faithful owed to God and paid forward in compassion. Gifted by grace, the human will, 'afire with supernal passion', extends God's love to others with gratitude and either 'through joy' or 'with sorrow for those others' suffering'.³⁹ Compassion in congregations was the outcropping of the grace given directly by God or through the sacraments and made effective by congregants, *servi caritatis*, as executors of God's love and forbearance.⁴⁰

To be clear, then: grace was on offer in the sacraments, regardless of a presiding priest's piety. But grace was not operative redemptively *outside* compassionate collectives, where those executors of God's forbearance worked to reconcile coreligionists. *Within* those compassionate collectives, *caritas* made grace effective and, Augustine assumed, led the faithful to reckon the regeneration of souls more glorious than this world's honors and riches. *Within*, a foretaste of the celestial trumped the terrestrial, where fools 'looked for rest' and peace of mind by accumulating wealth and glory, the impermanence of which 'provoked fear and sorrow'. Their obsessions with possessions 'did not permit them the serenity they sought' (*nec quietos esse permittunt*).⁴¹ But Donatists' collectives were clearly *outside*; the sectarians' refusals to end their schism attested as much, attested that they were persistently adversarial and apprehensive. In Augustine's mind – if not in his rivals' basilicas – sectarians' congregations were constantly on edge, which prohibited them from making the sacraments effective, *ex opere operantis ecclesiae*. The visible anointing in baptism there, although valid, could do the baptized no good, for Donatism's prelates' restless, reckless resistance to reconciliation rendered inoperative the grace sacramentally conveyed. For grace became effective only after the faith and love God implanted and sealed in the sacraments impelled the faithful to join congregants looking for rest in reconciliations that paid forward God's love for creation in compassion for others, encouraging the frail to be strong and the strong to be stronger still. It only remained, then, for the Donatists to acknowledge (*agnosce*), as their catholic Christian critics had, the truth of the psalmist's exclamation, 'how good and joyous it is when brothers dwell in unity'.⁴²

Augustine turned to botany to explain how compassion proceeded from the roots embedded in faith to heal broken branches as long as they were not (as the Donatists were) broken off. He added anatomy: wounded limbs may be healed; unfortunately, 'amputated limbs' were lost.⁴³ But, without love's 'binding power', no healing or

³⁸ Augustine, s. 259.2.

³⁹ Augustine, *pat.* 22.

⁴⁰ Augustine, s. 259.6; *civ.* 18.49, 19.6.

⁴¹ Augustine, *cat. rud.* 16.24–25.

⁴² Augustine, *c. litt. Pet.* 2.104.239, citing Ps. 133.

⁴³ Augustine, s. 162A.7.

surgery could occur.⁴⁴ Augustine recycled his amputation analogy and botanical references. Limbs may look to be lost, yet he counselled congregants in sermons not to think of them as irretrievable. Although there was no equivalence between what the compassionate could do for the weaker or wayward *within* their congregations and what their compassion might do for Donatists *outside*, his sermons asked auditors not to take the unpleasant consequences of schism as foreordained, as unalterable conditions of their passage as pilgrims through unfriendly terrain. Catholic Christians should look for opportunities to display the kindness awaiting the prodigal sectarian who, ideally, could be brought around to reconcile. He believed Catholic Christians' solidarity, serenity, friendship, and forbearance could be catching.⁴⁵

Agamben overlooks all this. In 1996, he confided that he was still waiting for a mind capable of conceiving communal alternatives.⁴⁶ He falls silent from that point, and the silence seems deafening. Nonetheless, he says enough to permit speculation that political discourse in his coming community would almost certainly be riddled with criticism of – and contempt for – the ways media and the marketplace process or package persons into forms that conform to sovereign powers' statist expectations. He would have singularities fashion uniquely appropriate forms of life after shedding what he characterizes as lacquered statist 'remedies'. Singularities as 'unique what-ers' could then enter 'the flow of being' without conditions of belonging, without imposed predicates, although not necessarily without communities.⁴⁷ Still, collectives in such a flow seem ill-defined and quite fragile, 'easily overrun', Daniel Bell presumes, 'fugitive', and episodic'.⁴⁸ Their intent, one imagines, would be to protect singularities' freedoms and exhibit democracy's sufficiency. Yet Agamben also confided in 1990 that existents' rights to singularity were 'on life-support'. They could only survive freely in the 'flow of being' in communities that were without preconceptions pressuring them to conform. To be sure, Agamben confounds, he flirts with words, uses terms idiosyncratically, and resorts to bluster. But among his distinctions, one stands out as straightforward and telling, the distinction between subjectivities patterned on commercial or political expectations ('being thus'; *esser-così*) and singularities ('being the thus'; *essere soltanto il così*). The first denotes a persona fashioned to correspond with preconceived forms of life. The second refers to the effort to craft a unique form of life. The goal of communication, which Agamben would have an innovative politics promote effectively, is still, as he claimed it was in 1990, 'the challenge of the coming generation'. The challenge for the 'coming community' was – and still is – to establish a decisive preference for 'being the thus' and an aversion to 'being thus'.⁴⁹ Augustine's contempt for many of the apparatuses and protocols of sovereign powers, which were obstacles to 'being [or becoming] the thus', might have pleased Agamben. One can imagine the two responding similarly to doubts Estelle Ferrarese expressed about the effects of 'being the thus' – about the survival of singularities without any sovereign power's protection. The two, that is, could address the issue of subjectivity's

⁴⁴ Augustine, s. 137.1.

⁴⁵ Augustine, s. 357.4-5.

⁴⁶ Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, p. 105.

⁴⁷ Agamben, *Comunità che viene*, pp. 72–73.

⁴⁸ Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Divinations: Theopolitics in an Age of Terror* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), pp. 164, 178.

⁴⁹ Agamben, *Comunità che viene*, p. 44.

vulnerability raised by Ferrarese by introducing a provision consistent with the positions both took on individuality's precarity: one loses vulnerability in nonconformity when sharing it.⁵⁰

We can lay out on the ground we have already covered Augustine's insistence that infusions and expressions of love following congregants' embrace of faith transformed compassionate collectives into instruments for a full realization of sacramental grace. Forbearance and sharing the burdens of others were the only ways that the faithful, when cultivating sentiments that led to reconciliations, could experience the binding power of compassion, binding them to each other, to their congregations, to catholic Christianity, and to Jesus' passion. Yet, remote from all this, 'failing to bear with one another in love, failing to preserve the peace and to learn to forge the bond of unity, and having no love', sectarians will not be saved.⁵¹

Augustine probed the connections between the compassion in compassionate collectives and Jesus' passion fairly early in his career. Soon after his return to Africa, he composed an extended reflection on the apostle Paul's injunctions to Galatians to bear each other's burdens. He referred to this as 'the duty of love' commended by Jesus, sealed – and dramatized – by his passion and atonement. Augustine held that the reciprocities, founded on faith and compassion, depended on the Christians' compassionate collectives' survival and solidarity, which supplied something of a foretaste of the celestial peace he often touted – the collectives, precincts of the city of God on earth, exhibiting a pervasive spirit of acceptance that distinguished them from other cultic communities.⁵²

Augustine understood how difficult it would be to incubate virtues that would cultivate reciprocities. One could say that Christian churches in late antiquity were convalescing. A long stretch of persecution, from the late third into the early fourth centuries, left the faithful fearful; the resurgence of paganism was an ever-present possibility. Emperor Constantine's edicts were not irreversible. But he did enable churches to convene court sessions ('audiences') to monitor behavior and umpire disputes. Augustine, however, thought more harm than good resulted as aggrieved parties blamed bishops when grievances were not resolved to their satisfaction. To console as pastor after being perceived to have been prejudicial as a referee or judge was a challenge requiring the cooperation of contentious congregants unlikely to appreciate distinct requirements associated with each role. Augustine shared his frustrations.⁵³ He may have been tempted to subscribe to Agamben's provision that juridical protocols be rendered inoperative in any 'new politics' that accommodated singularities' needs in his 'coming community'. For Augustine's preference was to have the faithful follow 'the law of Christ' rather than to have them litigate and rely on imperfect terrestrial laws for outcomes that seemed only to perpetuate abhorrent antagonisms.⁵⁴

⁵⁰See Estelle Ferrarese, 'Le projet politique d'une vie qui ne peut être séparée de sa forme: La politique de la soustraction de Giorgio Agamben', *Raisons politiques*, 57 (2015), 49–63.

⁵¹Augustine, *bapt.* 1.9.12.

⁵²See the exposition of Galatians 6:2 in Augustine, *div. qu.* 71.1–5 and Giuseppe Carrabetta, *Agostino d'Ippona: La chiesa mistero e presenza del Cristo totale* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2015), pp. 337–39.

⁵³See, for example, Augustine, *ep.* 48.1; s. 137.14; s. 311.13; *en. Ps.* 25(2).13; and *en. Ps.* 80.21. Also consult Peter Iver Kaufman, 'Augustine, Macedonius, and the Courts', *Augustinian Studies*, 34 (2003), 78–82.

⁵⁴Compare Augustine, *div. qu.* 71.7 with Giorgio Agamben, *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alla lettura ai Romani* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), p. 32.

He identified that ‘law of Christ’ with love but had little good to say about *amor sui*. Despite the incalculable damage that resulted from the unbridled self-interest it inspired, self-love and its obsessions with glory did bring a modicum of peace to the earthborn in terrestrial cities, he conceded, identifying ‘the law of Christ’ with another kind of love, with love among the reborn, promising them a foretaste of celestial peace in compassionate collectives.⁵⁵ Scholars acknowledge Augustine’s radical disjunctions between celestial and terrestrial faiths, hopes, and loves. But few admirers or critics locate elements of the celestial in the ecclesial.⁵⁶ And opinions also differ about the disjunctions’ consequences. Some think Augustine’s emphasis on two loves makes him a romantic, prepared to pull up the drawbridge and leave political cultures to work an assortment of dreadful devices undisturbed by Christians’ criticisms. Others think him a political realist whose disjunctions did not prohibit prelates from adapting theological virtues to renovate or rehabilitate political cultures. Yet, perhaps, having marked the disjunctions so clearly, he can best be described as a political radical, favoring political innovation rather than renovation. And that Augustine, an alternative to the romantic and realist, presents a radical antidote for the naïve and flimsy faith in political progress.⁵⁷ And that radical alternative should have attracted Agamben who proffered his own disjunctions between the political detritus of sovereignty – that include the discourses of citizenship and the creation and incarceration of the stateless – and the ideal or, in Agamben’s terms, the ‘messianic’. He might learn from a radical Augustine whose compassionate collectives could address concerns that no ‘coming community’ seems to come of singularities’ subtraction from sovereign powers’ apparatuses and protocols or from their having overcome tyranny with ‘potentiality’.⁵⁸

Agamben did appreciate Augustine’s efforts to organize a conventual community and inspire solidarity without juridical provisions.⁵⁹ Evidence from his later work suggests that he would have found Augustine’s promotion of compassion compatible with what his treatise on friendship commends as ‘a shared sensitivity’ (*con-sentimento*), whereby the intensity of the fellowship or bond – or, dare we say, compassion – Agamben says, ‘constitutes the political’.⁶⁰ And if this study accurately assessed his devotion to arouse and discomfort he ought to have found congenial Augustine’s sermons scolding parishioners for being so susceptible to sirens’ sordid songs celebrating the tawdry loves of this world. Sirens, in this application, could be construed as Augustine’s stand-ins for the media that, for Agamben, are complicit with sovereign powers captivating citizens and making conventional commerce seem compelling. Augustine admitted that he preached to make captives squirm, to disturb influential

⁵⁵Augustine, *civ.* 15.20–21.

⁵⁶But review the remarks on Augustine’s ‘inaugurated eschatology’ in Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 170–78.

⁵⁷For the disjunction, see Augustine, *civ.* 18.54. For one reply to colleagues – notably Robert Markus, Robert Dodaro, Eric Gregory, Charles Mathewes, and Joseph Clair – whose Augustines more or less favor renovation, consult Peter Iver Kaufman, ‘Augustine’s Dystopia’, in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. by James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 55–74.

⁵⁸Compare Augustine, *ep.* 153.18 with Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 48–52.

⁵⁹Agamben, *Altissima povertà*, pp. 41–42.

⁶⁰Agamben, *L’amico* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2007), p. 16, but also consult Agamben’s *Comunità che viene*, p. 31 and *L’uso dei corpi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2017), p. 313.

auditors who were comfortable with the compromises they must make to advance in their terrestrial cities.⁶¹ Predictably, he also meant to arouse the love God infused in the hearts of the faithful, to have them express it in their repentance, and to pay it forward in compassion for others. As that love grows, it incinerates the inferior loves and lusts – the envy and greed – which turn people into self-indulgent, sycophantic sinners and spread misery.⁶² The faithful pass through this world as pilgrims, much as Hebrews who had crossed the wilderness as refugees. Augustine's faithful overcome the aforesaid sirens; they sing a new song, 'a song of compassion'. As pilgrims (and refugees), they refuse to conform or to accept their captors' categories. Augustine clearly marked their route from nonconformity ('we have been delivered from Egypt') to compassion.⁶³

In Agamben's essays, the route from singularity and nonconformity to con-sensitivity is not at all clearly marked. More than twenty years have passed since he admitted his inability to give shape to his 'coming community', and the parameters and ethea of whatever alternative politics he imagined remain undefined. He promoted no communal developments from 'con-sensitivity' yet regretted that state-formation so consistently debases shared sensitivities and intimacies, both of which, he allowed, ought to have positive political implications. Sharing seems the very pulse of his new politics, at least in his treatise *L'amico*, which, unfortunately, gives no specific illustrations.⁶⁴ His critics, therefore, have a hard time locating its vital signs; they characterize his new politics as vague, enigmatic, mystical, or purposely evasive. A few of his more dissatisfied readers doubt whether a route from nonconformity to con-sensitivity exists. The latter suggests instability to them. Hence, his embrace of precarity in his introduction of *con-sentimento* puts most critics off. His tempestuous negations and fondness for indeterminacy, according to Nomi Claire Lazar, amount to a 'dysfunctional' and 'dead end'.⁶⁵

Agamben was unequivocal about sovereignty's oppressive effects that lock singularities into systems. Apparatuses of control – juridical, commercial, and internalized – assert themselves constantly. Augustine agreed. He routinely warned that laws kept humans hostage to inferior or lesser loves – the love of fame and of fortune. His sermons countenanced living life beyond those laws. For conventional law convicted rather than liberated. That sort of 'law terrorized, tethering persons to their guilt' (*terreat et constringat in reatum*).⁶⁶ Still, Augustine and Agamben saw such laws' influence was pervasive. By staging civic displays, moreover, sovereign powers proficiently distracted persons from realizing the extent of the laws' pressure for conformity. Augustine deplored such spectacles.⁶⁷ Agamben was nearly as disdainful. Motorcades pass; banners wave; passersby are awed; the elites remain secure.

⁶¹ Compare Augustine, *en. Ps.* 136.17 and *en. Ps.* 149.1-2 with Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, pp. 86–87 and with his discussion of 'anthropometrics', in *Nudità*, pp. 73–79.

⁶² Augustine, s. 178.11.

⁶³ Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.* 28.9.

⁶⁴ Agamben, *L'amico*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Nomi Claire Lazar, *Out of Joint: Power, Crisis, and the Rhetoric of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 205.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *en. Ps.* 129.3.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.* 10.9; *en. Ps.* 93.20.

Statist power on display subverts meaningful communication. Citizens grow indifferent to sovereign powers' invasive prerogatives.⁶⁸

Beguiled by spectacles and in awe of the laws, Augustine's congregants came to admire the games' patrons and the celebrities in the theaters and amphitheaters.⁶⁹ They forgot that laws brought nothing to perfection. They could not see that the veneer of respectability in late Roman culture only provisionally cloaked the spectacles' pagan patrons' impiety. So, Augustine argued, the faithful must occasionally be reminded that 'divine spectacles' were on offer in churches and that greater care, compassion, and regeneration were accessible in their faith's collectives. There, he told congregants, 'you must be determined to share with all others what you have received from God'.⁷⁰ There, compassion, given and received, made the grace received in their baptisms effective, *ex opere operantis ecclesiae*.⁷¹ For his part, however, Agamben seems partial to loners. Little surprise, then, Herman Melville's *Bartleby the scrivener* is a favorite. Agamben finds him in Melville's 'Story of Wall Street', clerking for a law firm, perfectly placed to exhibit contempt for both law (juridical protocols) and for capitalist commerce when he simply stops copying. He prefers not to. He freezes, in effect, halting all work yet refuses to leave his desk. Ironically, his inertia enlivens Agamben's brief for nonconformity. *Bartleby's* paralysis, however, does not signal indifference; according to Agamben, it 'frees potential' from becoming act and thereby reveals 'luminous' (albeit ambiguous, unspecified) possibilities. The only possibility that presents itself, however, is nonconformity. The balking scrivener may seem a forerunner of Occupy Wall Street or qualify as a celebrated labor activist, a pioneer of the sit-down strike, but Agamben's rendering of *Bartleby* keeps Melville's idle clerk singular – 'a unique whatever'.⁷²

Another of Agamben's protagonists, Peter John Olivi seems less of a loner at first. Among the Franciscans in the south of France and central Italy, he proposed what Agamben described as a life outside the law. Other Spiritual Franciscans stitched together the argument for their version of the apostolic life. They collected biblical precedents for using properties and taking provisions without claiming ownership. But, unlike Olivi, they presented their case in the church courts. To Agamben, in effect, they tossed in the towel before the first round; they accepted the jurisdiction of conventional apparatuses and protocols. Olivi thought use without ownership (*usus pauper*) could never be codified to the satisfaction of jurists. Among the mendicants, therefore, he was exceptional, another of Agamben's loners, a paladin of protest and potential. For Olivi insisted that practices, which followed from the Franciscans' vow of poverty and from the *usus pauper*, recapitulated the apostolic life – a life lived outside the laws during the first few centuries of the faith's existence and a life or a vocation

⁶⁸For example, compare Augustine, s. 90.6 and *en. Ps.* 53.10 with Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, pp. 69–70.

⁶⁹Augustine, s. 9.10 and s. 21.10.

⁷⁰Augustine, *en. Ps.* 103(2).11.

⁷¹See Augustine, *en. Ps.* 43.22, for 'divine spectacles'; also consult s. 366.2, citing Heb. 7:19–20 and, for the charitable or compassionate collectives as new creations, *en. Ps.* 103(3).26.

⁷²Agamben, 'Bartleby o della contingenza', in *Bartleby: La formula della creazione*, ed. by Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1993), p. 71 ('He is not simply indifferent but experiences a possibility – a power – a luminous flash of what is possible'). Gerard Delanty *Community* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 142–43 defines 'liminal communities' as aggregates created by crisis, dysphoria, or euphoria, aggregates that disperse as swells or surges of emotion subside.

beyond the medieval church's powers of recall. But the medieval church's hierocratic theorists and their allies among the mendicants were uncooperative and unyielding. Olivi was prolific and, to an extent, charismatic, but the upper tier of authorities in the Roman church and among the Franciscans was efficient, self-protective, self-indulgent, Agamben concludes, referring to the same traits among sovereign powers generally.⁷³

Agamben seems ready to inspire more tenacious Bartlebies and Olivis. In our time, they might emerge as nonconformist singularities in search of a new politics in which to invest their potential. Yet Agamben would know their challenges would be daunting. They must be prepared to experience ostracism, isolation, or worse, whenever they look to live incongruously or, in his terms, eschatologically and messianically. He makes that point, managing to cobble together an assortment of Christianity's canonical passages for a book-length study that turns the apostle Paul, an accomplished community organizer, into something of a loner. Striding and slightly swaggering into and through Agamben's *Il tempo che resta*, the apostle lives lawlessly and deactivates laws' norms to clear space for grace and for Agamben's messianic community. This is what becomes possible as love fulfills the law. The conventional and normative lose most of their heft and influence. On one occasion, Agamben has Augustine plump for what Paul would have denied, a culture of accusation reinforcing sovereign powers' hold over singularities, though both theorists have the apostle laboring to diminish the role of laws later responsible for calcifying Christian institutions' practices and protocols.⁷⁴

One would seem to need an exit strategy to lead a life outside the law. On that count, the apostle Paul helped: 'above all, love'. Augustine also found him useful; Agamben, looking to carve out alternatives to sovereign powers' protocols, might do so as well and to inventory ways that compassion could incubate virtues in his 'coming communities'. For the apostle's 'above all love' superseded law, assisting in amiable resolutions of conflict in compassionate collectives. Agamben decrees that authentic life does not take a predetermined course or form, but he simply refers to liberation and not to the love that follows from the abrogation of the biopolitical project. He overlooks the possibility that intersubjectivity may performatively determine singularities' affections and behaviors. It might have been otherwise, had greater familiarity with the apostle's challenges led him also to probe Augustine's pastoral and polemical efforts and to see how he drew a platoon of Paul's passages into reinvigorating fifth-century congregations.⁷⁵

The early Christian congregations visited or addressed by the apostle were parts of what Wayne Meeks characterizes as a 'luxuriant growth' of voluntary organizations – clubs, cults, and guilds – in the early Roman empire. But the Christians' collectives were more radical than most, Meeks explains, because their leaders looked to cross, then obliterate, social boundaries and to be socioeconomically inclusive.

⁷³Agamben, *Altissima povertà*, pp. 137–40, 173–74.

⁷⁴Agamben, *Il tempo che resta*, pp. 90–94, 114–15. For Agamben's Augustine and the culture of accusation, see Agamben, *Nudità*, pp. 39–40.

⁷⁵See Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), p. 272. Also see *Il tempo che resta*, p. 75 and *L'uso dei corpi*, pp. 60–62.

Evidence for congregational structure is underwhelming. The opposition from government compelled the faithful to button up against heavy weather. But scholars are reasonably certain that the local conditions governed what kinds of organization were possible. Nonetheless, Gerd Theissen's generalization seems sound: congregations functioned as extended families bound by mutual affection, which likely accommodated Christians committed to egalitarian 'ethical radicalism' along with others who cared to preserve secular society's caste systems in their congregations. Accommodation called for toleration. The apostle Paul looked to ensure both.⁷⁶ But Agamben misses much of this. He concentrates on the apostle's words, caring little about his world. Eva Geulen is right to call attention to the 'quasi-anarchic' trajectories in his work.⁷⁷

Persuaded sovereign powers' juridical protocols and apparatuses have so much misery to answer for, Agamben, as we now know, posits what could be termed a Pauline disjunction between law and love, much as Augustine had. But, unlike Augustine's Paul, Agamben's stays somewhat aloof. He is hardly an 'organizer of revolutionary cells', the 'Lenin of the early Christian movement', whom Alain Badiou retrieves from biblical records.⁷⁸ When Agamben discovers Paul pressing forward to accept his vocation, that 'press' is personal. Astonishingly, there appear to be no communal implications. Agamben supposes that the apostle approved or engineered a break between singularity and social conditions, and he – Agamben – follows suit. He thinks church officials from the late first century on, including Augustine, got Paul – and much else – terribly wrong.⁷⁹ For his part, Augustine opposed compassion not only to self-indulgence but to the juridical ways of this world. It was the bond of love that held together congregations – both within each and as a single, universal church as the body of Christ – so, arguably, compassion in its controversial, anti-Donatist context bears some similarity to the sentiment Agamben, as noted, gave political significance yet placed at the foundation of an 'inappropriate' intimacy.⁸⁰

For Agamben, subjects as singularities realize their potential, reconstitute themselves, and establish an indeterminable intimacy or con-sensitivity with others once they deactivated (or nullified) the apparatuses of captivity.⁸¹ For Augustine, subjects realized their callings when they admitted their notions of virtue and villainy were tentative, when they disavowed their lust for domination, and when they paid forward God's love for creation in compassion for others in compassionate congregations. To be sure, those collectives can hardly be taken as precursors of poleis that might

⁷⁶For governance, described as 'a loving patriarchy', (*Liebespatriarchalismus*), see Gerd Theissen, 'Soziale Schichtung in der korinthischen Gemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums*, 65 (1974), 266–67, 272. For 'luxuriant growth', see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 77–79.

⁷⁷Eva Geulen, *Agamben zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2005), p. 103.

⁷⁸Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 51–52. For the apostle's 'cells' and 'Lenin', see John M. G. Barclay, 'Paul and the Philosophers: Alain Badiou and the event', *New Blackfriars*, 91 (2010), pp. 173 and 179.

⁷⁹Agamben, *Il tempo che resta*, pp. 37–38 and 77, citing Philippians 3:12.

⁸⁰Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, p. 130.

⁸¹Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, p. 68.

develop from Agamben's lectures about sovereign powers' and reigning protocols' contributions to the aforesaid captivity. And, for that reason, he may well have elected to omit references to Augustine's alternatives to Donatism's churches. But his admiration for the sectarians' emphasis on character and Augustine's strident criticism of precisely that emphasis more plausibly account for the omission. At any rate, whatever experiments Agamben's readers may wish to launch as their versions of his 'coming community' might more cogently address problems that surface as one supersedes juridical protocols and puts love above the law, if those experimenting or launching reassess the relevance of Augustine's *ex opere operantis ecclesiae*.