

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM, OR ANOTHER GOSPEL?  
AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTIONS ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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### **Introduction**

Much of the contemporary critique of “empire”—especially from theological quarters—tends to be a hasty, at times naïve, invocation of an epithet to describe America as the world’s bully. Stepping just a couple of rungs above Michael Moore (which doesn’t get one too far up the ladder), this reactionary opposition—to the Bush administration in particular—tends to keep the notion of Empire tethered to the sovereignty of a particular nation-state. But Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have convincingly suggested in *Empire*—and more recently, *Multitude*—that we are dealing with a new mode of Empire that is unhooked from territories and (modern) nation-states, and linked to a network of “flows” of a transnational market.<sup>1</sup> Too much of the theological critique of “American Empire” is reacting as if we lived in an age of (modern) imperialism where sovereign nation-states are the principal actors and where empires are governed from a territorial capital.

But the thrust of Hardt and Negri’s analysis is to show that our age of Empire is post-imperialist; therefore, the nexus of Empire is not linked to or directed by a sovereign state, as the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

language of “American Empire” would suggest. Rather, Empire is post-national, and therefore any diagnosis and critique of imperial realities must abandon now antiquated imperialist paradigms, including all of the critical apparatus that was marshaled in opposition to such modern accounts of sovereignty. Granted, the United States continues to play a central role in Empire, but not as the territorial seat of imperialist power. There remains a link between America and Empire, but not as a qualifier: not *American* empire, but rather America serving Empire, even perhaps America as privileged colony *of* Empire, now understood as a transnational network of “flows” of capital through a global market that transcends territorial control. Post-imperial Empire means that the market has taken on a life of its own as a rather Frankenstein-ish creation of modernity that eludes the control of modern nation-states. Empire has outgrown the constraints of national sovereignty. Its anthem is no longer “Rule, Britannia!” or some other national hymn; its anthem is more on the order of, “I’d like to buy the world a Coke!”

However, though Empire does not have a sovereign throne located in Washington, D.C., there still remains an important connection between the two. What tethers Empire to the American nation-state is a particular notion of *freedom*. And looking at American foreign policy as a case study will highlight a significant feature of Empire that to this point has remained under-theorized, viz., the central motivating rhetoric of “freedom” as that which unites economic desire to political and military strategies expressed by a particular nation-state (in this case, the United States). At the same time, considering current global political realities in terms of freedom presents an opportunity for cultural critique in an Augustinian mode. An aging North African bishop, writing in the shadow of an ancient empire, can provide resources for a robustly theological engagement with the Empire of our own time. The Augustine that emerges from this

encounter is not the neoconservative Augustine invoked to baptize militarism as just, but rather an Augustine who, with prophetic insight, discerned the idolatrous heart of Rome's imperial vision so powerfully communicated in its fabulous civil theologies.

Why should we think that Augustine could provide a model for cultural critique in the twenty-first century? Let me suggest three reasons for invoking theology *as* cultural theory in our postmodern context of Empire. First, the language of American foreign policy as outlined, for example, in the National Security Strategy and the President's Second Inaugural, explicitly links the motif of freedom with theological themes, particularly the notion of the Creator and humanity's being created in the image of God. As the President claims in many speeches and addresses (echoing a theology already operative in the Declaration of Independence), freedom is a "gift of the Almighty" to every creature.

Second, we find a crucial link between freedom and religion in evangelicalism—the "brand" of Christianity with which the President identifies, and a sector of Christendom that has been one of the most consistent supporters of his foreign policy. Granted, evangelicals, it would seem, are more readily identified with practices of control and repression, not freedom. However, such a puritanical picture of evangelicalism fails to recognize the deep American evangelical commitment to the ideal of freedom. On the domestic scene, evangelicals—both public figures associated with evangelicalism, but also evangelical parishioners—tend to be ardent defenders of freedom, especially free markets.

One can see a paradigmatic (and influential) articulation of this in the work of Ted Haggard, former President of the National Association of Evangelicals. Haggard advocated what he described as a "free-market" approach to church ministry, and justified this approach by narrating a Fukuyama-like account of the end of history in globalized capitalism. As he put it,

*freedom works*. Over time, left to themselves and all things being equal, people would rather choose. Leaders, information sources, dish-washing detergent, whatever—people are wired to respond better, function better, maintain better, grow better, *live better* when they are allowed to choose.<sup>2</sup>

From this, Haggard concluded that our ecclesiology should reflect the same free-market principles. “We set out to harness the forces of free-market capitalism in our ministry,” he continued, comparing choice in church to the thrill of brand experimentation: “Have you ever switched your toothpaste brand, just for the fun of it?” This ecclesiology in the guise of the market is generated by a particular theological baptism of freedom—and more specifically, *freedom as choice*.

This emphasis on freedom is the primary reason why evangelicals tend to be staunch supporters of the most libertarian (economic) streak of the Republican Party (a quick survey of pronouncements and editorials from Chuck Colson, James Dobson, Pat Robertson, and others will substantiate the claim). They also tend to be deeply supportive of the Bush Administration’s foreign policy, including military operations purportedly undertaken for the cause of freedom (including, and perhaps even primarily, the freedom of the market). So on both domestic and international levels, evangelicals march eagerly under the banner of “freedom,” particularly the freedom of trade and the market. It should be noted, however, that evangelical Protestants don’t have the corner on this freedom market. There is no shortage of Catholic voices—Richard John Neuhaus, George Weigel, even John Paul II—who have hooked their theological wagons to the engine of freedom’s Empire.

Such an emphasis on freedom as necessary for capital’s “flow” is also a central feature of the “network” that is Empire. This connection points to a third reason for engaging religion, and more specifically, for invoking theology *as* cultural theory; and even more specifically, for

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<sup>2</sup> Ted Haggard, *Dog Training, Fly Fishing, & Sharing Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 48.

undertaking cultural critique with a distinctly Augustinian accent. Put most bluntly—perhaps more in the voice of Augustine contra the Pelagians than Augustine contra empire—evangelical affirmations of freedom (particularly the free market) are, in fact, affirmations of a heterodox (more specifically non-teleological, libertarian) notion of freedom which ought to be rejected by the catholic (especially Augustinian) tradition. Constructively, a critique of such liberal, market-driven reductions of freedom to “choice” invites the possibility that only the notion of freedom found in the Augustinian tradition—along with its attendant ecclesiology—constitutes a real alternative to that of Empire. While Augustine has been regularly invoked as the chaplain of Empire, especially in wartime, I’m wagering that the wedge of “freedom” will provide us with a quite different Augustinian cultural theory, one with resources for a deep but nuanced critique of the Bush Doctrine.

**The Gospel of Freedom:  
America’s (Evangelical) Foreign Policy**

In the days following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, George W. Bush found his voice as a “war president.” He immediately interpreted the violence as an attack on freedom, and thus marshaled the power of the American military to defend the cause. Concluding his first address to the nation on September 11, 2001, the President affirmed: “we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.” But in the middle of the speech, he also made it a point to assert that America remains “open for business.” We see, then, an early articulation of the intimate connections between freedom and a market economy, as well as a notion of freedom that is expanded by staving off “restrictions.” The links between these two ideas (freedom and markets) are further solidified in Bush’s Second Inaugural Address and the manifesto of the Bush Administration’s foreign policy, *The National Security Strategy* (2002). Most telling in this latter document is not just the centrality of freedom and its export for

American foreign policy, but its persistent link to—and expression in—free enterprise and free markets. Political freedom and democracy are almost always coupled with the goal of removing restrictions on markets and fostering entrepreneurial enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

In broad outline, the engine that drives U.S. foreign policy is *freedom*; more specifically, the export and expansion of “free regimes” as a way of fostering economic prosperity and ultimately securing peace. But behind this is a particular interpretation of freedom, what we could describe, *pace* Isaiah Berlin, as “negative” freedom: freedom as independence from external restraint. On this account, to be free is to be autonomous, self-directing, and unrestrained by external conditions (and any specification of a particular, defined *telos* as normative would constitute a restraint). Negative freedom is particularly evinced in the free market as a desirable, even essential, component of the expansion of “freedom” or “democracy”: wherein the free market is conceived as a quite radically *laissez faire* system that encourages consumer wants without restriction and seeks to remove all impediments to the expansion of the market and to minimize any “regulation” of corporate interest.

This seems to set the bar a bit too low, as if we will know that Iraq is free and can proudly pronounce “Mission Accomplished!” when Iraqis are able to buy clothes at Gap and eat at the corner McDonald’s. The expansion of markets requires the multiplication of options and choices—and any specification of *the Good* would limit those choices. In this respect, any normative, teleological conception of the good could impact entire industries of consumption. So I would suggest that what links liberalism and capitalism is a non-teleological notion of freedom.

As we have begun to see, what constitutes “freedom” itself (what we might call the “essence” of freedom) is not at all self-evident, despite the fact that the term is usually employed

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the priority of free *markets* over free elections seems to come to the fore in the administration’s negative stance toward the *democratically-elected* Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, precisely because his socialism would put “restrictions” on the market.

without interrogation, simply equated with liberty or choice. As Reinhard Hütter has recently suggested in *Bound to be Free*, “Like a coin handled for too long by too many hands, ‘freedom’ has lost its clear imprint. We still circulate the coin—the more quickly and the more frequently the less it is worth. Yet we no longer know what ‘freedom’ means.”<sup>4</sup> But this lack of interrogation and tacit assumptions about the nature of freedom cover the fact that we take too much for granted in talk of “freedom.” Instead, we need to acknowledge openly that every notion of freedom is theory-laden.

In the history of philosophy and theology, there have been two dominant, and competing, concepts of freedom. As alluded to above, one is a “libertarian” understanding of freedom that equates freedom with *freedom of choice* or the power to do otherwise.<sup>5</sup> To be free is to have *options* to choose and the *ability* to choose, uncoerced and unrestrained, from among these options. More options, more freedom. On this account, any specified *telos* for human agency—any determinate specification of “the good life”—would constitute a restraint on legitimate options, and therefore a restriction of freedom. To be free is equated with a state of *auto-sovereignty*, both with respect to the power to choose as well as the freedom to determine one’s own good.

This conception of freedom has become so dominant that it is almost impossible for us to think of freedom otherwise. And it is particularly this notion of freedom that feeds Empire and its market network. Because this libertarian, non-teleological, and negative concept of freedom eschews any specification of a *telos* as a restriction or constraint on my options, and therefore a

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<sup>4</sup> Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 12.

<sup>5</sup> I use “libertarian” here in both a loose and qualified way. One might also say that the notion of freedom operative here is voluntarist insofar as it identifies freedom with—and reduces freedom to—choice. In either case, I mean to indicate a notion of freedom which defines the essence of freedom as non-restriction or autonomy to choose *as* and *what* one wants.

restriction of freedom, it fosters the proliferation of choices without any valuation. Even the articulation of a normative good would restrict the range of options, and would therefore represent a restriction of freedom. This is precisely the environment necessary for the flourishing of the market, which requires endless creation of new “goods” for consumption and resists any regulation or restriction of such proliferation as a diminishment of freedom of choice (and a consequent diminishment of “prosperity”). Or, to put this otherwise, the only “Good” that can be specified is the good of prosperity, which requires precisely that we bracket any specification of “the Good” and let many *teloi* bloom (which really amounts to none).<sup>6</sup>

But here, I want to suggest, this non-teleological conception of auto-sovereignty *as* “freedom” is deeply antithetical to the first affirmation of the creed (and common to Jewish and Muslim faith traditions as well): the belief that humanity is created by a Creator who specifies the Good of human flourishing; that is, the Creator specifies the shape of the good life—it is not a matter of unregulated invention. In other words, as David Burrell has recently shown in *Faith and Freedom*, it is precisely the doctrine of creation which reminds us that we are not free to specify our own ends as we please; rather, it is just our status as creatures which makes us dependent upon the gifts of the Creator, who also specifies the end that properly constitutes human flourishing. It is important to highlight this classical (and shared) theology of creation precisely because the Bush Doctrine so often invokes the Creator as a way of underwriting its operative notion of freedom.

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<sup>6</sup> I should note that one could formulate this issue in a couple of ways. Is the issue that the market is *non-teleological*—that it does not even recognize a teleological orientation as an essential part of human choosing? Or is it rather that the market recognizes this teleological orientation of human agents but that it does not stipulate any *one* telos as “the Good?” I am inclined to think that the market does recognize and even presupposes a certain *structure* of desire, and thus does operate on the basis of a kind of formal teleology, but for that reason does not specify any particular, substantive understanding of the Good. Thus, in what follows, by teleology I mean not just a structural or formal teleology, but rather a *normative* teleology. On this account, a formal teleology (like the market) would still be “non-teleological.”

Historically, the tension between the affirmation of a Creator and libertarian freedom tends to have two exit strategies: either a functionally a-theistic account of human freedom as autonomy or a rejection of the assumption that freedom *just means* libertarian auto-sovereignty. Modernity opted for the former. Determined to value human autonomy above all else, modernity's valorization of freedom "has been (especially in a capitalist culture) unduly limited to choosing," but for just that reason it was necessary to reject any kind of participatory dependence upon the Creator. In fact, Burrell notes that when considered theologically, libertarian freedom requires "that a free agent parallel a creator *ex nihilo*."<sup>7</sup> What the monotheistic theological traditions ascribe to the Creator, modern libertarian accounts of freedom ascribe to creatures. It is this notion of freedom that undergirds—and is exported by—both contemporary American foreign policy and the market network of Empire. Hence I am also suggesting the antithesis: to affirm freedom as libertarian, non-teleological auto-sovereignty requires rejecting the Creator—or, at least, rejecting the theological claim that there *is* a determinate Good for human freedom which is specified by the Creator. In other words, it requires rejecting anything more than a Deist creator.

However, there remains the second exit option of rejecting this reduction of freedom to unrestricted auto-sovereignty and reinscribing freedom *as* "participatory"—as a way of being that is oriented to a particular end. Augustine articulated this alternative account of freedom not as libertarian freedom of choice (which he linked to sin), but rather as positive freedom *for* the Good. To be free is to be empowered and enabled to choose the (specified) Good that constitutes authentic human flourishing. This understanding of freedom stands in marked to the libertarian assumptions behind both "liberal" and "conservative" discourse. I would like to articulate this

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<sup>7</sup> David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), vii.

Augustinian alternative as a viable (and genuinely alternative) option in our current political climate.

**Free to Think Freedom Otherwise:  
Elements of an Augustinian Social Theory**

Thus far I have suggested that a non-teleological, libertarian concept of freedom—the concept of freedom assumed both by Empire and American foreign policy—is just one possible account of freedom. Although President Bush links this notion of freedom with the notion of a creator, it is inconsistent with the baseline orthodox confession that God is Creator of humanity, and more specifically with the Augustinian account of participatory freedom affirmed in the catholic tradition. To appreciate this tension, consider a sketch of this Augustinian account of freedom, drawing on recent restatements of it by David Burrell, Reinhard Hüter, and David C. Schindler. This is grounded in the conviction that rigorous cultural critique requires hard theological work. If our commentary on socio-political realities is to rise above punditry, we must move beyond religious formulae and slogans. To loosely paraphrase Barth, we need to keep the *Summa* and *City of God* on the desk with our morning dose of the *New York Times*. And this is especially true for slippery, propaganda-prone concepts like “freedom.”

Ultimately, my concern is to show that if we want to oppose the fruits of Empire (such as the injustices of economic globalization, the environmental effects of consumer capitalism, and the militarism that is mobilized to keep it all running), then we must oppose the roots of Empire—and in order to do that, we must find an alternative to the non-teleological notion of freedom bequeathed to us by liberal modernity. In this respect, the ancient and medieval account of freedom articulated by Augustine could be a genuine alternative for postmodernity.

Burrell has recently articulated a maxim that highlights the difference between negative, non-teleological notions of freedom and a catholic account of “participatory” freedom: as he

starkly puts it, “no creator, no freedom.” This maximizes the tension between the two accounts because it directly counters most common modern intuitions, viz., that in order for there to be freedom, there must be no relations of dependence or external forces that might impinge upon the “free” agent. Burrell’s counter-intuitive maxim crystallizes the core of the Augustinian alternative. The argument works as follows:

Seeking to eliminate the theological overtones of the Scholastics, especially the disruptive presence of a free creator, modernity erected a philosophical account of freedom that (at least) ignored the presence of a creator and instead conceived of freedom on wholly immanent grounds. There are two key effects of this modern shift: first, it denies any transcendent object of desire and thus excludes any kind of robust teleology; second, it makes any external or transcendent dependence a compromise of autonomy. The primary deficiency of libertarian freedom, then, is that it disconnects freedom from the dynamics of desire. Instead, freedom becomes a “power” that resides self-sufficiently in autonomous human agents. Freedom is thus reduced to both a radical indifference and auto-determination.

Burrell sees this exemplified in Descartes, but emerging most significantly in Duns Scotus. For Scotus, it is the *will* that determines what one does: the task of the intellect is to simply present to the will a list of possible actions from which to choose. Freedom is thus identified with a sort of radical indifference. It is this, according to Burrell, which marks Scotus “as a ‘modern man,’ for whom freedom is auto-determination of an ‘indifferent’ power, as in ‘the church of your choice.’” Hence it is not surprising, Burrell surmises, that a Scotist account of freedom is the regnant conception

in a liberal society where *choice* spontaneously dominates discussions of freedom, as ethicists are preoccupied with decisions and economists concerned with trade-offs. What is conspicuously missing from such parlays is a vision of the end or goal of a society, and understandably so, since such questions become procedural

in a society where the reigning ‘theory of justice’ finds it both possible and expedient to bracket any discussion of the human good.<sup>8</sup>

Once freedom is conceived in this way, there’s no room left to think about God positively empowering action. Any involvement of God in human action could only be a compromise of human agency. By choosing to preserve auto-determination and indifference, modernity could at best retain only a Deistic creator—which is, of course, just the God who makes a showing in the Declaration of Independence.

The libertarian emphasis on autonomy and indifference is linked to a denial of teleology, and because of this connection, the dynamics of desire are ignored. It is related to a confusion about just how to think about *causality* with respect to human action. By seeking to locate all “power” of “choosing” internal to the human agent, and by conceiving causality only in terms of efficient causality, a libertarian concept of freedom misunderstands the classical (and catholic) account of freedom. As already noted, there is a significant way in which the modern, libertarian subject mimics or even replaces a free creator, or at least exhibits all the characteristics of a free creator. So it is not surprising that philosopher Roderick Chisholm would suggest that the free human agent is a “prime mover.” The human will is a paradigmatic self-starter; it moves itself. But this allusion is instructive precisely because of the way it misconstrues Aristotle.

Chisholm envisages the human will as a “prime mover” because, Burrell notes, he “presumes Aristotle’s prime mover to be an initiator, a ‘pusher.’” But “a coherent account of a prime mover requires that it be unmoved and that it cause whatever moves to move by being the object of desire.” In this respect, the prime mover is a *puller*, not a pusher; to put it otherwise, the prime mover, as an object of desire, is a *final*, not an efficient, cause. It is a mover by allure, not pressure. This “erotic” account of human freedom, Burrell argues, does a better job of honoring

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<sup>8</sup> Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 106.

the complexities of human choosings. “Does one push oneself out of bed in the morning,” he asks, “or is one rather drawn by the prospect of something enticing?” Unlike the modern reduction of freedom to autonomy, which reduces human beings to “mere ‘choice-machines,’” a teleological understanding of freedom “offers a more phenomenologically satisfying analysis” because it recognizes that “our choosings are always embedded in a rich texture of desires.”<sup>9</sup>

Once we reject the “pusher” paradigm and reclaim the dynamics of desire, we will then have to affirm that freedom is inherently teleological, which ultimately requires that we articulate a substantive vision of “the Good” (though we can also concede that *in media res*, and prior to the eschaton, there will be a plurality of confessions about what constitutes the Good). The “puller” paradigm will also help us to affirm *both* freedom *and* the Creator, and even Burrell’s stronger maxim, “no creator, no freedom.” In other words, the erotic dynamic of teleological freedom requires that (a) freedom be *teleological*; (b) that there be a (perceived or tacit) *normative* telos for free human action (the Good at which human action aims); and (c) that we articulate *the* normative telos for human action (in the Christian tradition, the triune God).

Let me try briefly to unpack this. First, the desiring paradigm of teleological freedom allows us to conceive of God entering into our actions without deterministically interfering, viz. as the final cause that draws out our choices and orientation. God “makes me” will something not by pushing, but by pulling. In this light, a transcendent “cause” *always* pulls human choice because of the embedded dynamics of desire. This is the most formal articulation of why freedom is teleological.

But a formal teleology is not enough, since one could then perhaps still envision a teleology of indifference: my choices are oriented to and “pulled by” an end, but there is no valuation of ends. However, as David C. Schindler has recently demonstrated (in a lucid essay in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 40.

*Augustine and Politics*), this could not be the case because then we could have no phenomenological account of why an end *attracts* us. The dynamics of desire play on an erotic attraction which attributes something attractive to the desired (chosen) end, even if it is only “represented” as such. So the dynamics of desire demand that the alluring ends of free actions be represented as goods; and this requires an ultimate or intrinsic good, or at least the representation of such. “Something that is purely optional,” Schindler comments, “cannot, strictly speaking, be intrinsically good. [...] [U]nless there exists some good that is good in an absolute sense, that is, good in itself, as an ultimate end, there can be no goods even in a relative sense.” The ultimate end will be, albeit wittingly and unconsciously, linked to something like my ultimate confession; in other words, what is attractive will be determined by the deep stories that shape us. In our pre-eschatological situation, there will be a plurality of such confessions, and thus a plurality of (perceived) ultimate ends.

But the final assertion of an Augustinian account of freedom will further specify not only a formal teleology, nor only a formal teleology that specifies a particular good, but the concrete and specific articulation of the Triune God as *the* ultimate Good and proper object of human desire. Properly functioning desire will mean that the free human person is oriented toward the Triune God. On this account, humans are not self-starters, but responders; freedom, then, is less a matter of “choosing” and more a matter of “accepting” a gift, or “consenting” to what Henri de Lubac would describe as the in-built orientation of one’s being.

This responsiveness does not prevent an Augustinian vision of freedom from offering an account of indifference or freedom of choice (the most developed account is found in Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio*). However, instead of valorizing it as the proper metaphysical condition of freedom, Augustine sees freedom of indifference as a failure to be properly free.

The indifferent agent has averted her orientation to the Good, which is both the source and goal of proper freedom. “[R]efusing such a good is tantamount to denying our nature,” argues Schindler, and such refusal of the Good “leads one toward enslavement by lesser goods. Enslavement because one is only free to choose goods not ordered to one’s final goal *via* a mistaken judgment (i.e., thinking that they are so ordered) or as a consequence of refusing one’s own orientation to that good.”<sup>10</sup> If we valorize freedom as mere freedom of choice, then we end up affirming the condition of a *dis*-ordered soul as metaphysically normative, and we will end up describing as “free” what Christian theology describes as a state of sin. We will also end up describing the rightly-ordered agent as somehow *un*-free because he is not free to do otherwise—that is, not free to do just “whatever he wants.”

This presents another problem with the libertarian account of freedom: if the defining feature of freedom is the “ability to do otherwise,” then sin would always remain possible. But as Augustine indicates, the hope of the eschaton is being *non posse peccare*. In his discussion of this redeemed condition, Augustine immediately anticipates and counters the libertarian response. As he articulates it in *City of God* (22.30):

Now the fact that they will be unable to delight in sin does not entail that they will have no free will. In fact, the will will be the freer in that it is freed from a delight in sin and immovably fixed in a delight in not sinning. The first freedom of will, given to man when he was created upright at the beginning, was an ability not to sin, combined with the possibility of sinning. But this last freedom will be more potent, for it will bring the impossibility of sinning; yet this also will be the result of God’s gift, not so some inherent quality of nature. For to be a partaker of God is not the same thing as to be God; the inability to sin belongs to God’s nature, while he who partakes of God’s nature receives the impossibility of sinning as a gift from God. [...] Free will was given first, with the ability not to sin; and the last gift was the inability to sin.

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<sup>10</sup> David C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects,” in *Augustine and Politics*, eds. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 89.

It would seem that on a libertarian model, neither God nor the redeemed human could be described as properly “free.” This is, one hopes, a clear sign of the antithesis between modern, non-teleological accounts of freedom embedded in the Bush Doctrine and the catholic, Augustinian vision of freedom rooted in a classical theology of creation.

### **Conclusion: Back to the Beginning**

Given the inconsistency between Empire’s conception of freedom and orthodox Christian confession, why is it that Christians—many evangelicals Protestants and some Catholics—have been so quick to find congruence between the Gospel and Empire’s valorization of “freedom?” Why does the theology of freedom behind American foreign policy seem to map so easily onto contemporary evangelical notions of the Gospel? Or why was evangelicalism “primed,” as it were, for this embrace of non-teleological freedom and hence Empire?

I suggest two factors. First, contemporary evangelicalism, as heir of a certain revivalist theology, has inherited a largely negative, libertarian notion of freedom: this is a tale of Charles Finney beating out Jonathan Edwards as America’s most influential theologian. In the end, I suspect the complicity of revivalism with libertarian freedom is one of the key reasons that evangelicalism was primed to absorb a notion of freedom which is, in fact, “another Gospel” (Gal. 1:6), owing more to Locke and Hobbes than to Augustine and Edwards.

This also points to a second factor, true for both evangelical Protestants and Catholics who are more comfortable with Empire: the formation of our imagination, and in particular our vision of what it means to be human, is too often trumped by visions and stories that are antithetical to the Gospel of participatory freedom. To articulate what it means to be “free” is to get to the very heart of what it means to be human. But just what fundamentally animates our imagination on this score? To which stories are we listening? Have we (unwittingly or not)

inclined our ear to the tales told by Empire rather than those narrated by Jesus? When we envision freedom as a negative, non-teleological matter of multiplying choice, it is a sign that we are listening to other gods. Our theologemes have been too easily co-opted for another Gospel, to the point that we are adept at narrating tidy explanations for the consistency of catholic confession and the “march of freedom” expanding under the banner of the military-industrial complex.

In this situation, I suggest that it might be *only* Augustine’s ecclesial multitude (not Hardt and Negri’s post-Marxist “multitude”) that can contest and overthrow Empire.