As religious reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turned from the elaborate rituals and ecclesiastical hierarchy of Rome in an effort to recover the purity and simplicity of the Patristic Church, so they rejected the Scholastic theologians in favor of the early Fathers, especially Augustine. His sensitive treatment of the psychology of conversion made him attractive to the private, introspective side of Protestantism, while his emphasis on the word of God, revealed in Scripture and proclaimed by God’s chosen ministers, provided support for the Protestant challenge to institutional authority and justified the evangelical activities that disseminated Reformation ideas so effectively. English Protestants felt Augustine’s influence by transmission from Luther and Calvin, but they also encountered his work directly and acknowledged their debt openly. Indeed, as Peter Fiore points out in his introduction, “The significant thing is that these champions of the ‘pure’ word, who on principle rejected human authority, used Augustine more than any other writer, save Paul” (p. 11). Milton likewise, Fiore asserts, was heavily indebted to Augustine, whose works he would have read as a student in addition to hearing them quoted from the pulpit. It is the burden of Fiore’s brief study to substantiate this claim of indebtedness, which if not controversial has at least never been seen in the sharp relief an examination of the two figures in isolation can provide.

Fiore in fact narrows the scope of his undertaking still further, concentrating on three doctrines inherent in the myth of the Fall, all of which are central both to Augustine’s thought and to Paradise Lost: the preternatural world, Original Sin, and Redemption. But before examining these, he must first outline the metaphysics which underlies them. Consequently, after an introductory chapter which surveys the renewed interest in Augustine during the Reformation, Fiore turns to a discussion of the angelology of the two writers. Like Augustine, Milton insisted upon the goodness of nature and located evil in the perverse will of the fallen angels. Perfect within their own spheres, Satan and his followers rejected the opportunity of the greater glory the incarnation made available, and so their fall was the result not of a flaw in their nature but of their willful denial of a created hierarchy. Fiore uses this Augustinian distinction to illuminate Satan’s poignant confession at the beginning of Book IV of Paradise Lost, and he finds it important to an understanding of the irony of Satan’s elevation in Hell. And if Milton relied upon Augustine to explain how evil can occur in a universe created by a beneficent God, so he employed the Augustinian concept of the felix culpa as the basis for his justification of God’s ways to man, to show how apparent evil is turned to greater good. This central tenet is, in fact, “the underlying theme which penetrates the whole epic” (p. 20).

Like the angels, man fell through an act of will, and he lost thereby nothing essential to his humanity but only those “preternatural” qualities granted to him by God on condition that he remain innocent. Among these qualities are a perfect knowledge of those things necessary to live in accordance with the laws of reason, and a nature in which the senses and the passions are in harmony with the dictates of the will and the intellect. Up to this point, Fiore has offered very little that is original and
has omitted much that his subject would seem to require: Milton's treatment of astronomy, conforming to Augustine's in The Confessions, offers unacknowledged support for Fiore's discussion of Edenic knowledge, for instance; while on the other hand the extent to which Milton's angelology can be attributed to Augustine needs the qualification that a discussion of the corporeal angels of Paradise Lost would provide. Yet in his treatment of preternatural life Fiore employs an Augustinian idea that manages to account in a new way for the suspect behaviour of Milton's Adam and Eve before the Fall. For Augustine, "It is one thing not to have sin, and it is another thing not to abide in that goodness in which there is no sin." Thus the human couple can, without belying their innocence, manifest "a weakening of the will, a slipping or falling from perseverance, a failing to abide in that goodness in which there is no sin" (p. 41). But they remain sinless until they commit the prohibited act.

Since man's Edenic character resided only in his preternatural and supernatural qualities, Original Sin did not alter what is fundamental to his humanity. Consequently after the Fall "the human nature that he handed on to his children was perfect of its kind (p. 54) yet lacking the grace which had allowed man to exist in easy compatibility with God and with himself. It remained, then, for grace to be restored by the Redemption, and Fiore treats this last major doctrine under three headings: the Incarnation, the offices of Mediation, and the Qualities of redemption. On the subject of the Incarnation, Fiore again finds Milton to be Augustinian. The central question here is whether the Incarnation is independent of creation and sin or whether it is God's merciful response to sin, and while both views are present in both writers, Fiore sees Milton like Augustine inclining to the latter. But though Christ's Incarnation responded to an event in time, nonetheless the offices of mediation through which he executed the Redemption belong eternally to his character. He is always prophet, priest, and king, but for the Trinitarian Augustine, the suffering incurred in the sacrificial, priestly role resided in Christ's humanity; Milton insisted that he suffered in both his human and his divine natures. Finally, as Fiore points out, Milton's view of Redemption itself, which emphasizes "the hope and optimism that spring from God's mercy" (p. 11), more closely resembles Augustine's position than does that of most seventeenth-century Augustinians. Despite Milton's insistence on man's freedom to choose salvation, he saw the Redemption along with Augustine as the result of overwhelming divine love.

In this book Fiore presents clearly and compactly Augustine's thoughts on three basic doctrines and shows how they find restatement in Milton's writings, especially Paradise Lost. If less thorough than C.A. Patrides' Milton and the Christian Tradition (1966) or J.M. Evans' Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition (1968), it is nonetheless more accessible. Yet readers who are not aware of the long and complicated history of Augustinian theology may get the impression that Milton's reliance on Augustine was more direct and thoroughgoing than is in fact the case, for Fiore adopts a method of progressive selectivity that leads to over-simplification. Starting with Augustine's position on each subject, Fiore then moves to an examination of the correspondences in Milton's prose. Thus when we get to Paradise Lost we are directed only to those points that fall along the straight line already charted. As a result, we are led to overlook or minimize the importance of passages where the congruence is less neat. But perhaps as significant as the tendency to exaggerate Milton's doctrinal debt to Augustine is the failure to consider Augustine's influence...
on Milton’s poetics, a subject treated suggestively by Stanley Fish in Self-Consuming Artifacts (1972). Fiore then offers us a study that can usefully direct us to central points of agreement in doctrine between Milton and Augustine, but which, as the result of its aims and methods, cannot do full justice to the richness, complexity, and originality of either writer.

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For more than a decade, Richard Trexler has been exploring the ritual life of Renaissance Florence. He has studied sacred images and propitiatory processions, nunneries and confraternities, charity, charivari, and martyrdom; and he has published the results of his studies in the scholarly journals of two continents and several academic disciplines. Now he has gathered the results of these scattered studies into one volume, revising his earlier work and integrating it with fresh material to produce what is clearly the most substantial of the several recent books on religious life in the Italian Renaissance.

Trexler combines long study in the Florentine archives with unusually wide reading in the social sciences, and he aims his book at both historians and social scientists. There are some signs that he intends his book to be encyclopedic: in discussing Renaissance Florence, he draws parallels with Australian aborigines, early Chinese cities, and the American peace marches of the 1960’s, and a glance through his index turns up entries for hair, hands, and hats, as well as heresy and humanism. He certainly intends it to be a comprehensive re-interpretation of Renaissance history, in the light of insights gleaned from cultural anthropology. Trexler insists that ritual was “obviously as broad in function as civic life itself” (p. 127). For him, “all urban dwellers were actors, one way or another, in the ritual drama. The city is the theatre; the play presents the past, present, and future of participants and audience” (p. 10). He extends the meaning of ritual to cover not just religious rites imbedded in and explicated by a coherent body of dogma, but interpersonal relations and diplomatic activity, and so collapses the distinction I would make between ritual proper and rite behaviour, leaving no way of differentiating between taking communion and saying “gesundheit.” Indeed, he is principally interested in just that sort of formalized behaviour that greets a sneeze — the words and gestures that Florentines used automatically both in ordinary daily life and in moments of personal and political crisis.

But Trexler offers his reader more than the thrill of learning singular things, for he always adduces his examples of curious behaviour in support of some more general idea. He begins by extracting from Florentine behaviour implicit notions of time, space, and community, and showing how these notions affected the ways in which Florentines dealt with friends and family. He then proceeds to analyze the role of ritual in the political arena. He starts from the position that “for many years the main problem of communal government was that it had no real access to ritual honor” (p. 256). The adult males who formed the Florentine political class, while wealthy, were