

In *Faith Order Understanding*, all of the late Louis Mackey's virtues are on display. His sensitivity to language and to the limits of language to bear stable meaning seems especially appropriate to the study of what is arguably the most elastic of the medieval traditions of thought, the so-called Augustinian tradition. Defining that tradition by the project of "faith seeking understanding," Mackey documents this precise point in exacting detail at one of those places in any body of Christian thought where heaven and earth can be said to meet – rational reflection on the existence of God. What he makes very clear is that "not everyone who proves the existence of God is proving the same thing" and "those who prove the existence of God do not all understand the nature of proof in the same way." These phrases are generally true in his judgment of any and all rational reflection on the existence of God but they are also especially true to the variety of such reflections to be found within the Augustinian tradition and among its four greatest medieval representatives: Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Scotus.

Mackey's way into the Augustinian tradition and its reflection on the existence of God is philosophical, though he is extraordinarily sensitive to the literary decisions structuring the texts he examines because of the proofs they contain. Moreover, he is deeply aware of the historical context in which each author finds himself and the ways in which that context speaks to the texts each author produces. In addition, he is well aware of the interpretive traditions surrounding the texts he has chosen to engage. Indeed, he deepens the understanding of the essential character of Augustinian philosophizing within the context of "faith seeking understanding" by adding to it a truly basic and constitutive notion of hierarchic order that demands a unique origin and thereby opens up the possibility of a valid if circular proof (a constructive hermeneutical circle). What one receives thereby in the most exquisitely indirect way possible is confirmation of that typically acute Nietzschean intuition that an explicit and formal atheism is not decisive for the "death of God." For, as he put it, inasmuch as someone still believes in grammar (one manifestation of hierarchic order), one still believes in God.

In this work, Mackey deepens our sense of the philosophical project of medieval Augustinianism in and through its natural theology. He does so in prose that is crystal clear, deceptively simple and straightforward. There is less of the poetry than is to be found in much of the best of Louis Mackey's work elsewhere. Nevertheless, this volume displays his characteristic sensitivity to tensions and reversals motivated by recognition that existence is more complex and mischievous than we can comprehend. Here, his sensitivity is restrained and put in the service of an act of homage to the tradition of thought and imagination that makes up the beating heart of this work. As a result, Mackey does for the medieval Augustinian tradition something like what Boehner had begun to do for Franciscan thought of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, especially of Ockham, and what Gilson worked tirelessly to do for the Thomist tradition.



# FAITH ORDER UNDERSTANDING

Natural Theology in  
the Augustinian Tradition

---

LOUIS MACKEY

Foreword by  
ROBERT SWEETMAN



Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies  
Toronto

*Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication*

Mackey, Louis

Faith order understanding : natural theology in the Augustinian tradition / Louis Mackey ; foreword by Robert Sweetman.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-88844-421-9

1. God (Christianity) – History of doctrines – Middle Ages, 600–1500.
2. God – Proof, Ontological – History of doctrines – Middle Ages, 600–1500.
3. Natural theology – History of doctrines – Middle Ages, 600–1500.
4. Augustine, Saint, Bishop of Hippo. 5. Anselm, Saint, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1033–1109. 6. Bonaventure, Saint, Cardinal, ca. 1217–1274.
7. Duns Scotus, John, ca. 1266–1308. I. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies II. Title.

BT98.M33 2011

212'.1

C2011-900614-6

© 2011

Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies

59 Queen's Park Crescent East

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C4

[www.pims.ca](http://www.pims.ca)

MANUFACTURED IN CANADA

To the memory of my teacher,  
ROBERT E. CUSHMAN (†1993),  
who introduced me to the power and the grace  
of the Augustinian heritage



# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Foreword	xi
Preface	I
1 The Idea of Order at Hippo Regius: Augustine's Proof of God's Existence	7
2 Of Mere Being: Anselm, Gaunilon, and the Fool	46
3 The Lover, the Believer, and the Poet: The Imagination of Order in Bonaventure's Natural Theology	75
4 The First Idea: Scotus on the Forms of Essential Order	120
Epilogue	165



## Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to Ela Unverdi for transforming my crude typescript into elegantly processed words. This was a labor of love for which I cannot adequately express my appreciation.

– LOUIS MACKEY

I wish to acknowledge as reader of and now long-time graduate school guide to medieval Augustinian texts my ongoing debt to the philosophical perspicacity and literary swash-buckle of Louis Mackey's publications which have pleased, contradicted (and so irritated), but, above all, illumined me time and again over the last fifteen years. I would also like to thank the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies for giving me the chance to express my debt in this delightful format. To be able to contribute to the appearance in print of Mackey's last testament is a serendipity of my present; and who is not charmed by serendipity's gentle touch?

– ROBERT SWEETMAN

We gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of friends, colleagues, and students of our late father: Ignacio Angelelli, Amy Fields Whitworth, Amelie Frost Benedikt, Roger Gathmann, Owen Goldin, Kathleen Higgins, Claudette Kane, Robert Kane, Richard Linklater, Linda K. Mackey, Eva Mackey Meyrat, Chad McCracken, Janet McCracken, Emrys Westacott, and nine contributors who wish to remain anonymous.

– EVA MACKEY MEYRAT and JAKE MACKEY